SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

VOLUME 6 **SHINKO THE KAPPA**

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

首斬り朝

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

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Punished is not the man himself,
but the evil that resides in him.

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SHINKO THE KAPPA

by KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

6

A NOTE TO READERS

Samurai Executioner is a carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

SAMURAI 首斬り朝 EXECUTIONER

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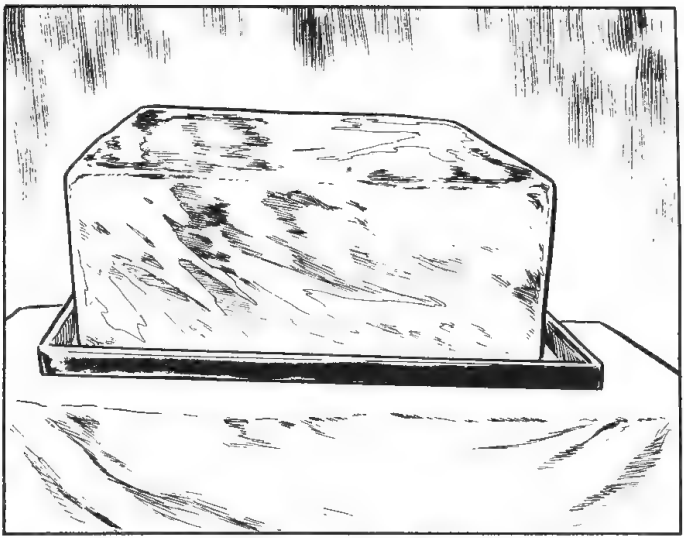
the twenty-third

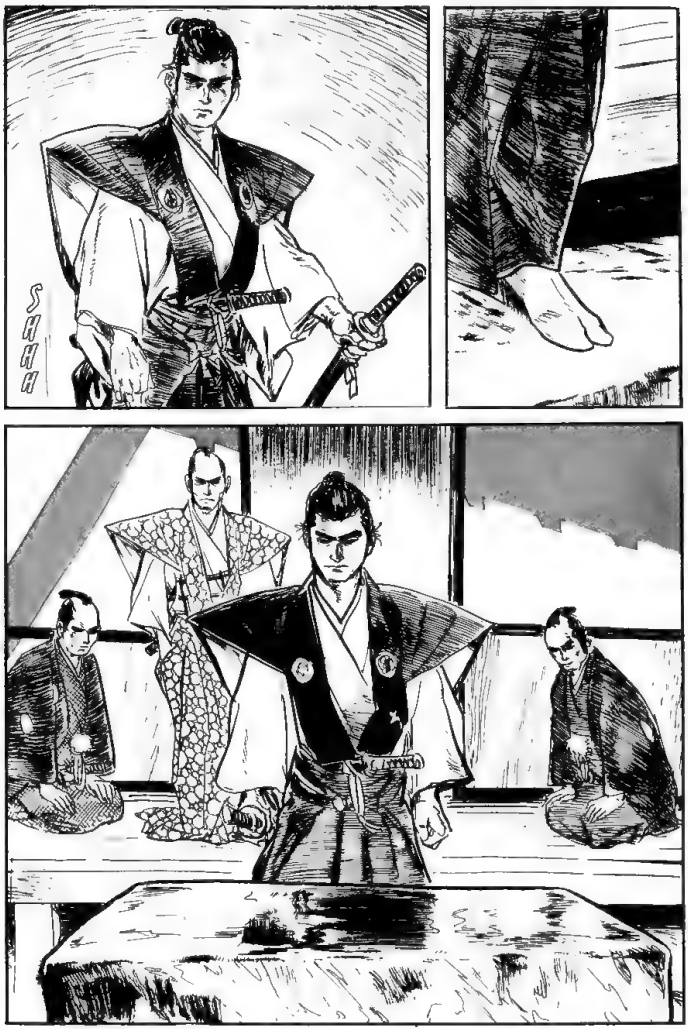
Gobazi Sandosu

ASAEMON! THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT YOU TO CUT!
I WONDER WHETHER EVEN SOMEONE AS SKILLED AS YOU CAN CUT INTO IT.

CLAP!
CLAP!
IT'S SET UP IN THE GARDEN, SIR.



SO...
CAN YOU SPLIT
THIS THICK ICE
IN TWO?

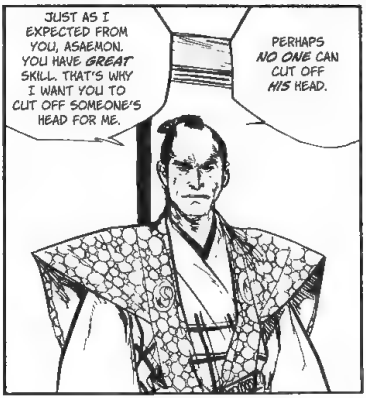

SHHH

KTCH

BSSSH!

CCCRACK!

ICE CAN'T BE CUT...
...BUT IT CAN BE SPLIT.


JUST AS I EXPECTED FROM YOU, ASAEMON. YOU HAVE GREAT SKILL. THAT'S WHY I WANT YOU TO CUT OFF SOMEONE'S HEAD FOR ME.
PERHAPS NO ONE CAN CUT OFF HIS HEAD.

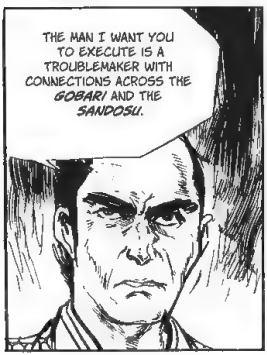
IF ICE IS THICK, IT'S LIKE IRON AND STEEL. IT REQUIRES THE *UTMOST* SKILL TO CUT INTO IT. YET IN REALITY, IT'S A WEAK SUBSTANCE THAT MELTS IN THE HEAT.
THE MAN I WANT YOU TO EXECUTE IS WEAK BY HIMSELF. HE'S JUST AN ORDINARY HUMAN BEING. BUT THOSE *AROUND* HIM ARE AS IMPENETRABLE AS ICE.

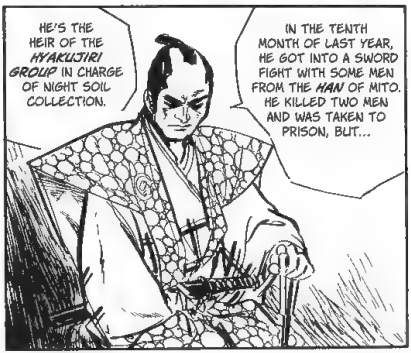
HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE TERM *GOGAI SANDOSU*?
YOU MEAN THOSE WHO WORK IN THE *GOGAI* AND THOSE WHO WEAR LONG SWORDS?

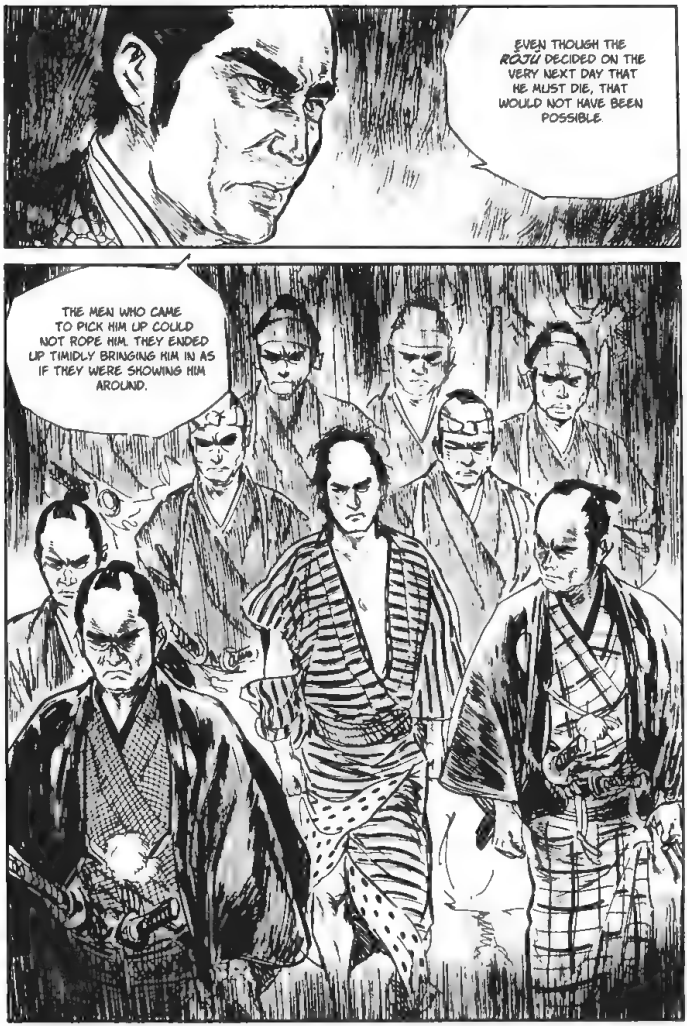
YES. THOSE WHO WORK IN THE FIVE DOMAINS ARE RACKETEERS, GAMBLERS, THE NIGHT SOIL COLLECTORS OF KASAI...
THE FORTY-EIGHT BANDS OF FIREFIGHTERS, AND THE *ORISUKE* SERVANTS OF THE *DAIMYÔS*...

THE NIGHT SOIL COLLECTORS OF KASAI HAVE THE *BIGGEST* DOMAIN OF ALL--THE *ENTIRE* CITY OF EDO, ALL *808* SECTIONS OF IT!
IN SENJU--OR *ANYWHERE* IN EDO--IF ONE WANTS THEIR NIGHT SOIL PICKED UP, ONE HAS TO HAVE *THEM* TAKE IT TO KASAI!

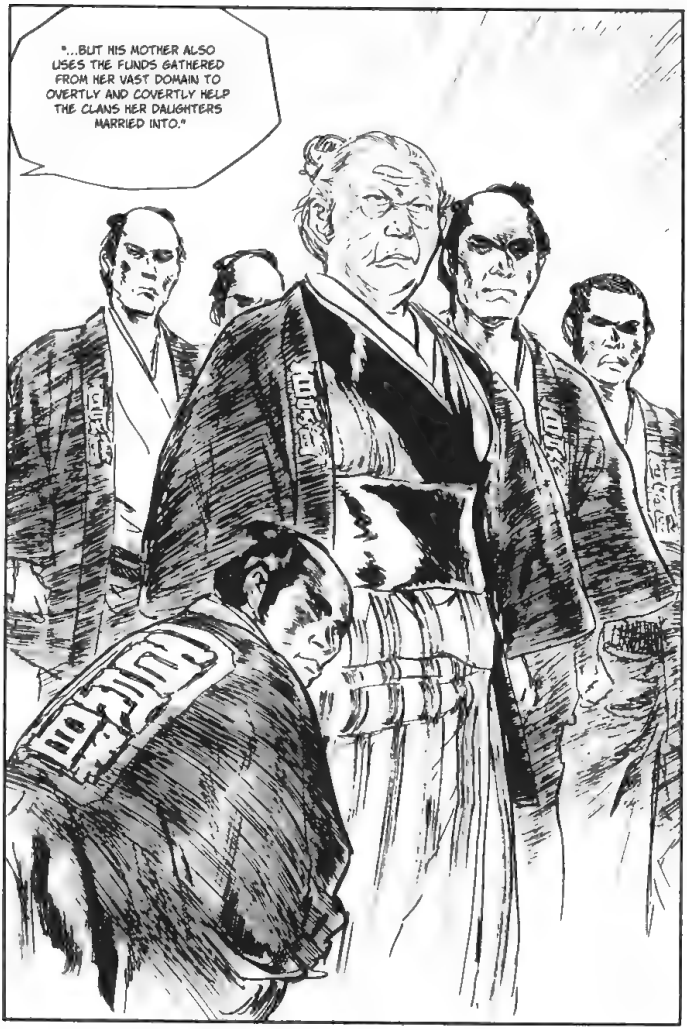
NEEDLESS TO SAY, *SANDOSU* REFERS TO THOSE IN THE THREE LONG SWORD-WEARING PROFESSIONS.
RACKETEERS, GAMBLERS, AND BARBERS--A LOT OF THEM BEING FALLEN *RONIN*.


THE MAN I WANT YOU TO EXECUTE IS A TROUBLEMAKER WITH CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE *GOBARI* AND THE *SANDOSU*.


HE'S THE HEIR OF THE *HYAKUJIRI GROUP* IN CHARGE OF NIGHT SOIL COLLECTION.
IN THE TENTH MONTH OF LAST YEAR, HE GOT INTO A SWORD FIGHT WITH SOME MEN FROM THE *HAN* OF MITO. HE KILLED TWO MEN AND WAS TAKEN TO PRISON, BUT...


EVEN THOUGH THE ROJU DECIDED ON THE VERY NEXT DAY THAT HE MUST DIE, THAT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE.
THE MEN WHO CAME TO PICK HIM UP COULD NOT ROPE HIM. THEY ENDED UP TIMIDLY BRINGING HIM IN AS IF THEY WERE SHOWING HIM AROUND.

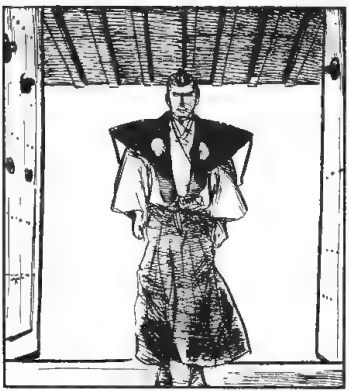
"THAT WAS TO BE EXPECTED. HIS MOTHER, OLD O-TOME OF THE HYAKUJIRI GROUP, ALSO HAS FIVE DAUGHTERS
"FOUR OF THEM ARE MARRIED--ONE TO THE MURASAME CLAN CONTROLLING THE EDO RACKETS, ONE TO THE MYOJIN GAMBLING CLAN...
"ONE TO THE RO GROUP OF FIREFIGHTERS, AND ONE TO THE KAKIDAYA WHO RUN THE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY FOR ORISUKE"
AND SO HE'S NOT ONLY TIED INTO ALL FIVE OF THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU...


"...BUT HIS MOTHER ALSO USES THE FUNDS GATHERED FROM HER VAST DOMAIN TO OVERTLY AND COVERTLY HELP THE CLANS HER DAUGHTERS MARRIED INTO."

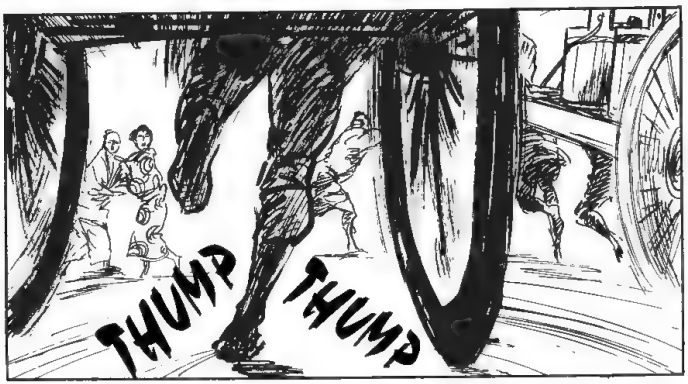
NOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT KIND OF HEAD HE HAS? IT'S ONE ENCASED IN THE THICK ICE OF THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU! EVEN THE MEN OF TENMA PRISON--FROM ISHIDE THE PRISON COMMISSIONER RIGHT DOWN TO THE HEAD PRISONERS--ARE SCARED TO DEAL WITH HIM!
IT IS VERY EASY TO ANGER HIS MOTHER, OLD O-TOME, AND BE THE TARGET OF HER EVIL EYE. GIVEN THAT HE WAS TAKEN IN WITHOUT ANY ROPE, THERE WAS NO MAN WHO COULD EXECUTE HIM.
BUT CAN YOU DO IT, ASAEMON?
THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE VERY HESITANT TO HAVE HIM EXECUTED
WE CAN'T HAVE SOMEONE WATCHING OVER YOU NIGHT AND DAY!

IF THEY KEEP COMING AFTER YOU, THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE WILL *NOT* BE ABLE TO PROTECT YOU!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT *ME*...
YOU MAY NOT BE ABLE TO RELY ON *ANYONE* TO COLLECT YOUR NIGHT SOIL...
I'LL DO IT *MYSELF*.
IF I START A FIRE, I'LL PUT IT OUT MYSELF.

ON THE DAY WHEN JINKICHI, HEIR OF THE HYAKUJIRI GROUP OF THE NIGHT SOIL COLLECTORS OF KASAI, WAS TO BE EXECUTED...



CLATTER
CLATTER
CLATTER
RRRUMBLE!!

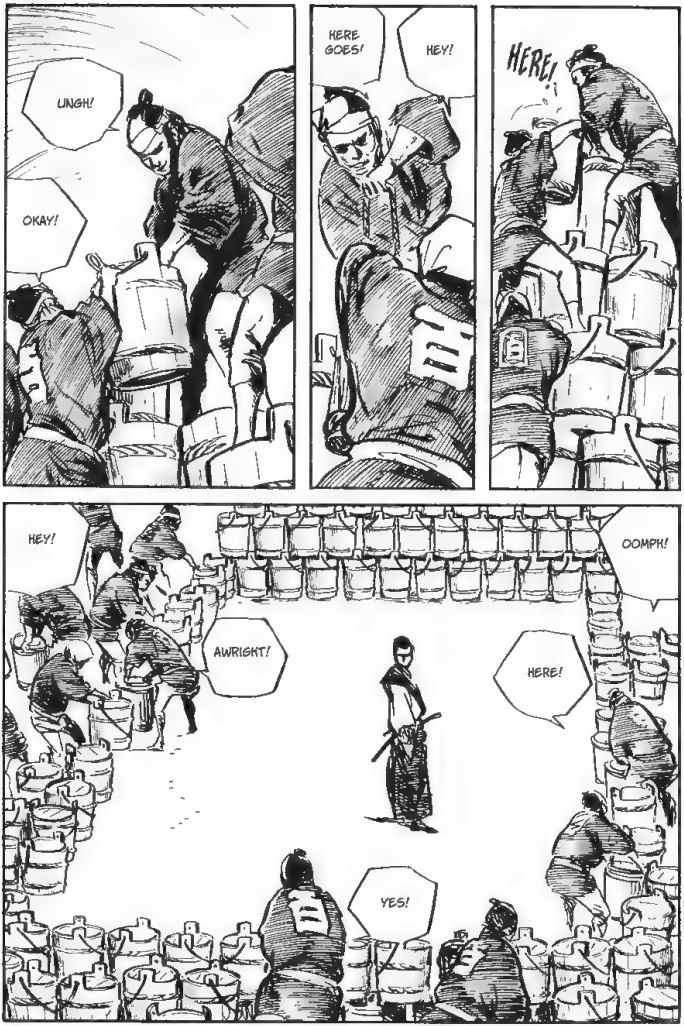

THUMP
THUMP

RATTLE
RATTLE
RATTLE

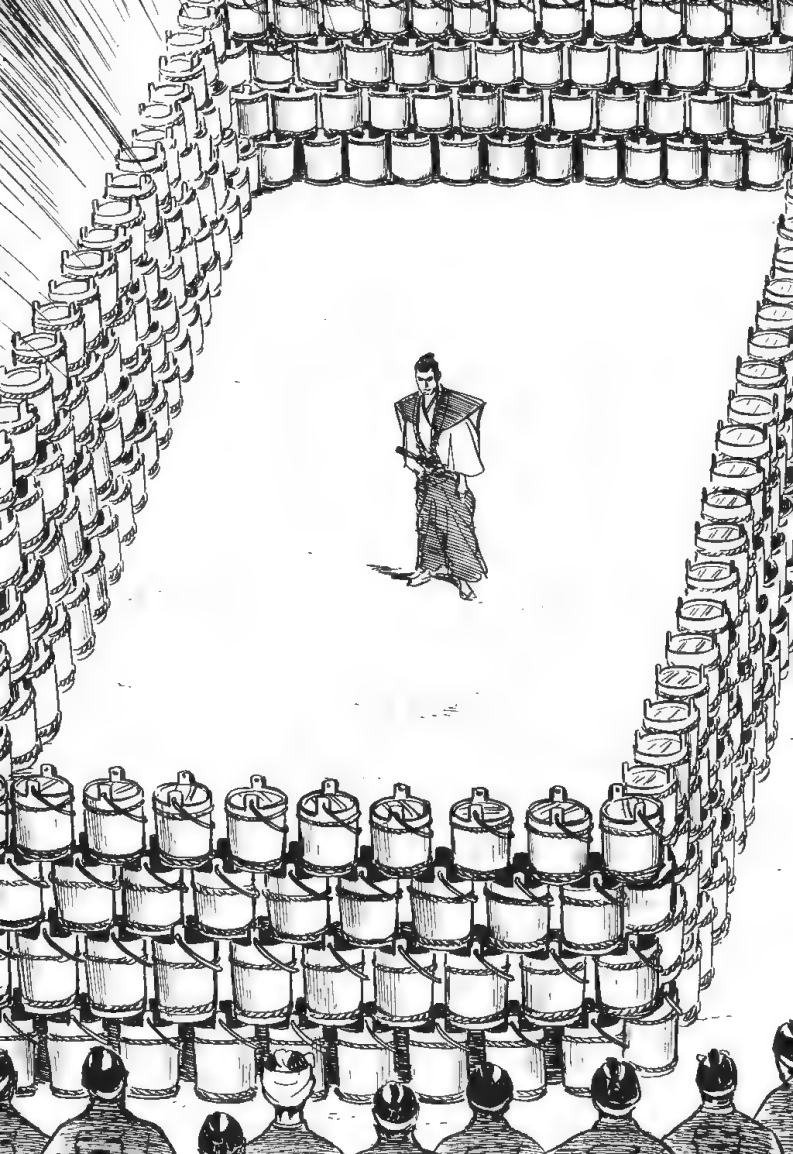
CLATTER
CLATTER
CLATTER
WHAT'S THAT ?!
IT STINKS!
-HIT'S THOSE GUYS FROM KASAI!
THE HYAKUJIRI GROUP!
UGH! THAT SMELL! ALL THAT MANURE THEY'RE HAULIN'! THEY'RE NOT GONNA SCATTER IT ALL OVER EDO, ARE THEY?!

AWRIGHT!
HERE YA GO!
OKAY!
HEY!

AWRIGHT!
LET'S DO IT!
UNGH!


UNGH!
OKAY!
HERE GOES!
HEY!
HERE!
HEY!
AWRIGHT!
OOMPH!
HERE!
YES!

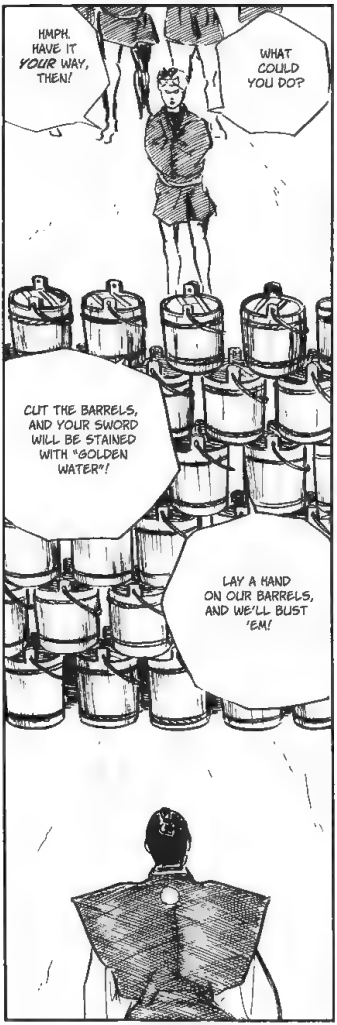
AWRIGHT!
HERE!
UNGH!
YES!
OOMPH!
HERE!
HERE!
LETS DO IT!
YEAH!
HEY!
YES!



YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE, AND YOU'RE NOT EXECUTING ANYONE
SO WHAT'LL YOU DO NOW, YAMADA-SAMA ?!
WHO ARE YOU?!

I'M AME, THE OLDER SISTER OF JINKICHI— THE MAN YOU WANT TO EXECUTE!
THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF TONE OF THE HYAKUJIRI GROUP OF THE NIGHT SOIL COLLECTORS OF KASAI!
YOU INTEND TO OBSTRUCT THE LAW?!
WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO LEAVE MY BROTHER ALONE MY BROTHER DID IT, BUT IT WAS THE MEN FROM MITO WHO WERE AT FAULT!
THEY WERE DRUNK AND GOING ABSOLUTELY WILD. HE TRIED TO CALM THEM DOWN, BUT HE ENDED UP GETTING INTO A FIGHT.
NOW IF YOU'LL RECONSIDER... YOU'LL SEE THAT YOU'RE IN NO POSITION TO EXECUTE MY BROTHER.
I HAVE ORDERS FROM THE TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE TO EXECUTE THE CONDEMNED.
I MUST DO MY DUTY NO MATTER WHAT. TO OBSTRUCT ME IS TO OBSTRUCT THE BUSINESS OF THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF! CLEAR THE WAY!
EVEN IF THE RŌJŪ AND THE TOWN COMMISSIONER ORDER AN EXECUTION, THEY CAN'T HAVE IT IF THERE'S NO ONE TO DO IT!

THAT'S WHY WE'RE BEGGING YOU, YAMADA-*SAMA*. THERE IS NO ONE BUT *YOU* WHO COULD EXECUTE MY BROTHER.
NO!
YOU DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?! YOU THINK YOU CAN LIVE IF YOU MESS WITH THE *GOBARI* AND *SANDOSU*?!
WE'RE BEGGING YOU. GO BACK AND TELL THEM YOU DON'T FEEL GOOD, OR THAT YOU'VE CAUGHT A LITTLE COLD, OR *SOMETHING*. AND WHEN THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE URGES YOU TO TRY AGAIN, TELL THEM YOU'RE HAVING STOMACH PROBLEMS OR WHATEVER SO YOU CAN *DELAY* THE EXECUTION.
YOU DON'T GET ANY RICE FROM THE GOVERMENT, SO YOU'LL BE IN A *REAL TIGHT SPOT!*
IF YOU DO AS WE SAY, THE *GOBARI* AND *SANDOSU* WILL MAKE YOUR LIFE *EASY* FOR YOU! YOU'LL HAVE MONEY... WOMEN...
NO!


HMPH. HAVE IT *YOUR* WAY, THEN!
WHAT COULD YOU DO?
CUT THE BARRELS, AND YOUR SWORD WILL BE STAINED WITH "GOLDEN WATER"!
LAY A HAND ON OUR BARRELS, AND WE'LL BUST 'EM!

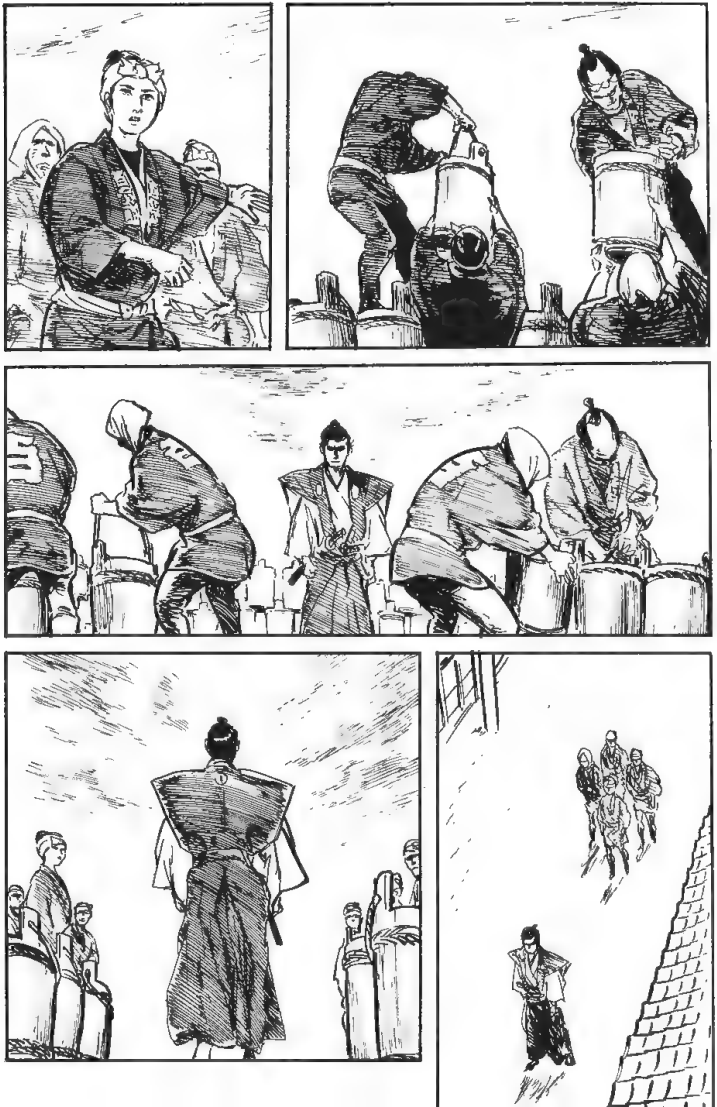
YOU'LL *COMPLETELY* LOSE FACE IF YOU'RE SHOWERED WITH "GOLDEN WATER"! YOU'LL BE THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF ALL EDO! COULD YOU ACCEPT *THAT*?!

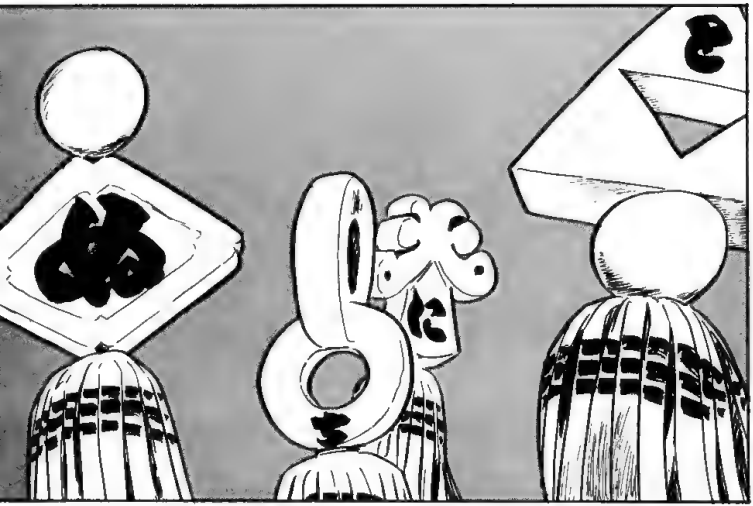
THAT'S TOO BAD! IF *YOU* DON'T MOVE THOSE BARRELS OUT OF MY WAY, *I* WILL!
EVEN IF YOU SHOWER ME WITH EXCRETA, THERE'S NO EXCUSE TO NEGLECT MY DUTIES!

OKAY!
EVERYONE! IF HE LAYS ONE HAND ON THE BARRELS, BUST 'EM!
I'LL GIVE YOU ONE WARNING. IF YOU SHOWER ME WITH EXCRETA, YOU WILL ALSO BRING DISGRACE UPON JINKICHI. AS HIS KINSMEN, COULD YOU ACCEPT THAT?!
AN EXECUTIONER MUST BE PURIFIED THROUGH BATHING BEFORE PERFORMING HIS DUTY! IT IS AN ACT OF RESPECT TOWARD THE CONDEMNED WHO IS TO REMORSEFULLY EMBARK ON DEATH'S JOURNEY!
ARE YOU SAYING THAT I AM TO EXECUTE HIM--EVEN IF I AM SMEARED WITH EXCRETA?

IS *THAT* WHAT A KINSMAN SHOULD DO?!
JINKICHI WILL ATONE FOR HIS CRIME WITH HIS *LIFE!* IF YOU DISGRACE HIM, YOU'LL STAIN HIS DEATH! HE'LL *NEVER* ATTAIN BUDDHAHOOD! HE'LL GO STRAIGHT TO *HELL!*

MOVE THOSE BARRELS!
IF YOU DON'T, I'M COMING THROUGH!

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YAMADA-*SAMA*, WE'VE BLOCKED *ALL* THE ROADS BETWEEN HERE AND TENMA. WE SUGGEST THAT IT WOULD BE BEST IF YOU GO *BACK*...
YOU INTEND TO OBSTRUCT THE *LAW*?!
WE FIREFIGHTERS HAVE THE *RIGHT* TO BLOCK THE ROADS IN CASE OF FIRE.
THAT'S ONLY WHEN THERE *IS* A FIRE.
THE WIND'S VERY *STRONG* TODAY. IT LOOKS LIKE A FIRE *MIGHT* BREAK OUT.

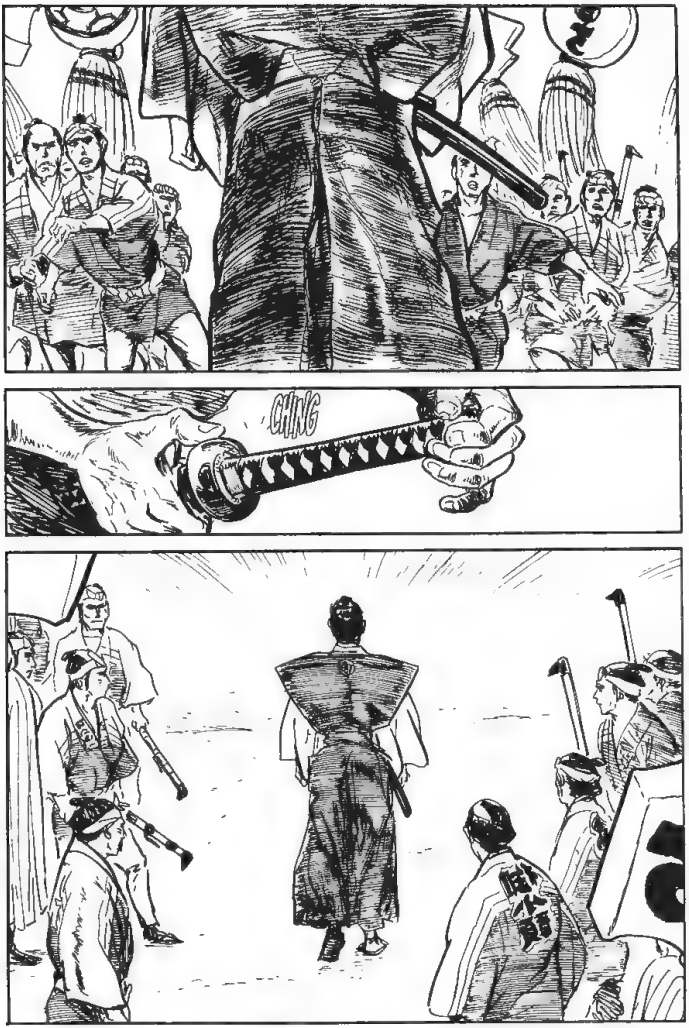
ANYWAY, *WE* PROTECT ALL 808 SECTIONS OF EDO FROM FIRE.
IF ANYONE INTERFERES WITH *OUR* DUTIES, IT'S *FINE* IF THEY *DIE*.
PICH!

I'M CUTTING DOWN YOUR MATO!!

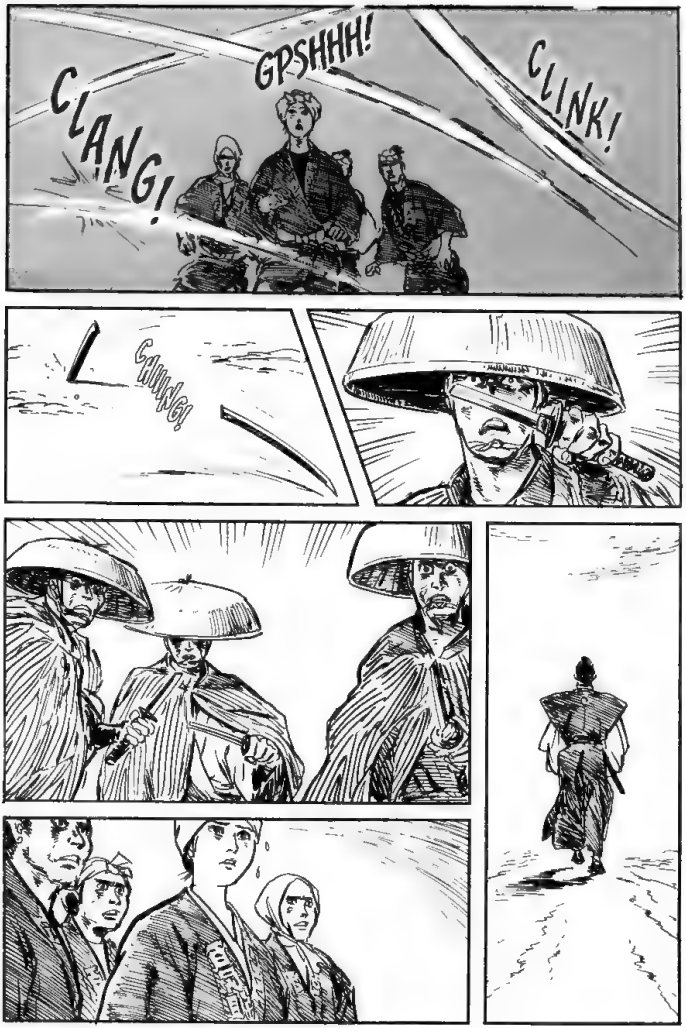
DON'T MOVE!
TAP
TAP

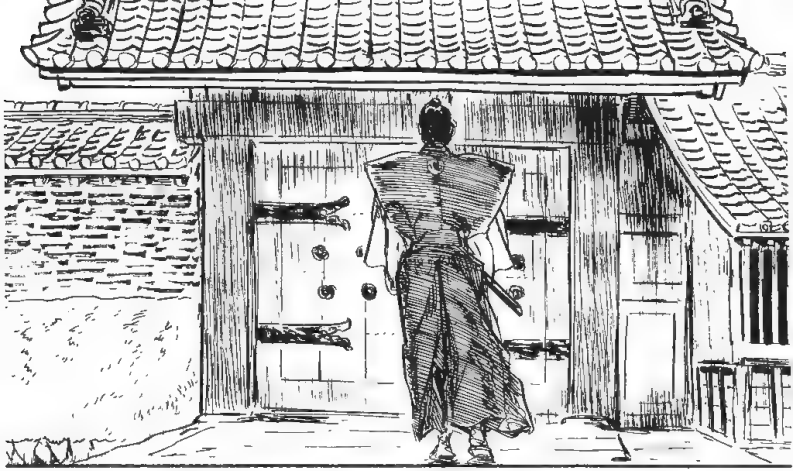
I'VE HEARD THAT A MATOI IS THE SOUL OF A FIREMAN! IS THAT TRUE?!
Y-YES, BUT...
S-SIR, ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO...

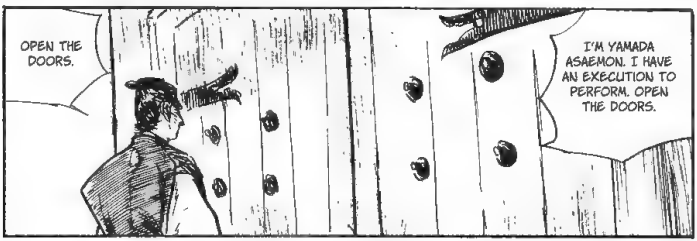
I'M CUTTING IT!
IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR MATOI CUT DOWN, CLEAR THE ROAD!


CHING

WHOOSH!
WHOOSH!
PSHHH!
PSHHH!
PSHHH!

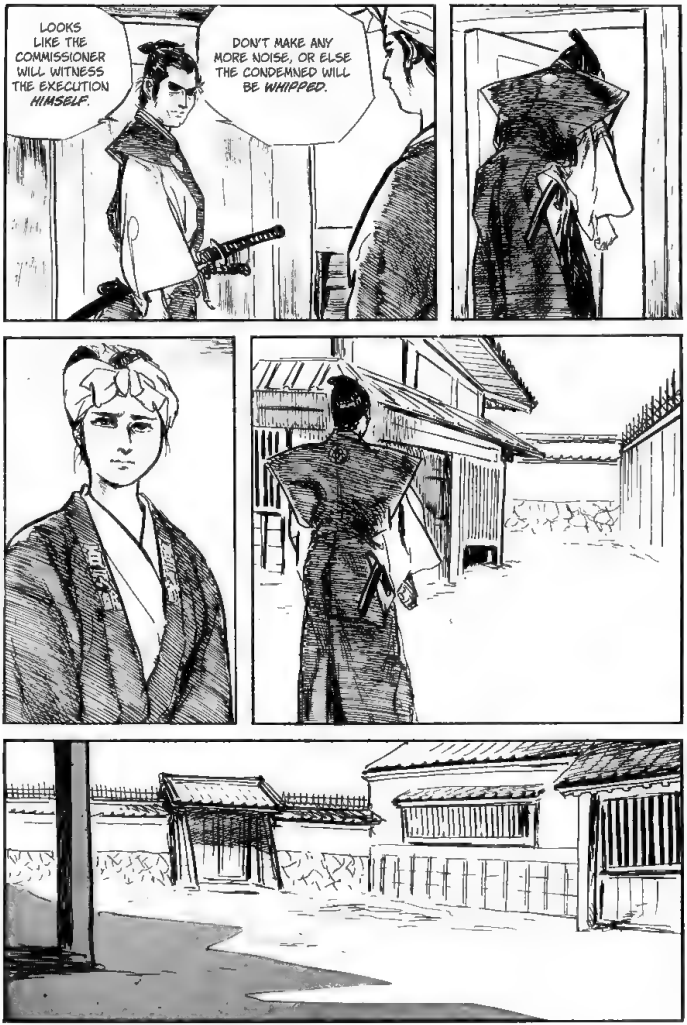

CLANG!
GPSHHH!
CLINK!
CLING!

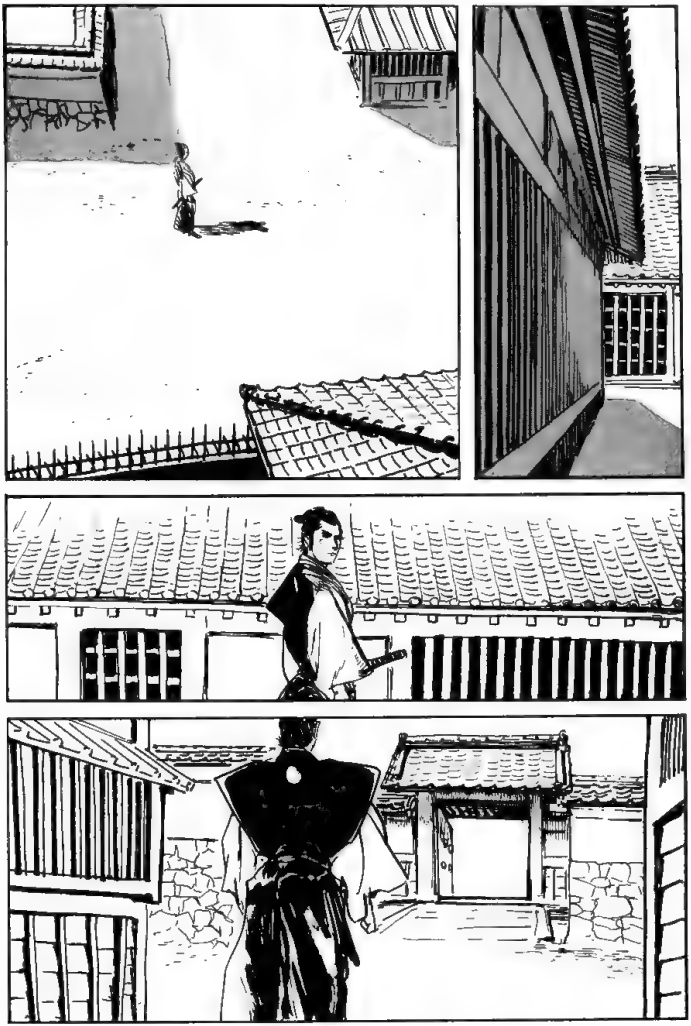



OPEN THE DOORS.
I'M YAMADA ASAEMON. I HAVE AN EXECUTION TO PERFORM. OPEN THE DOORS.

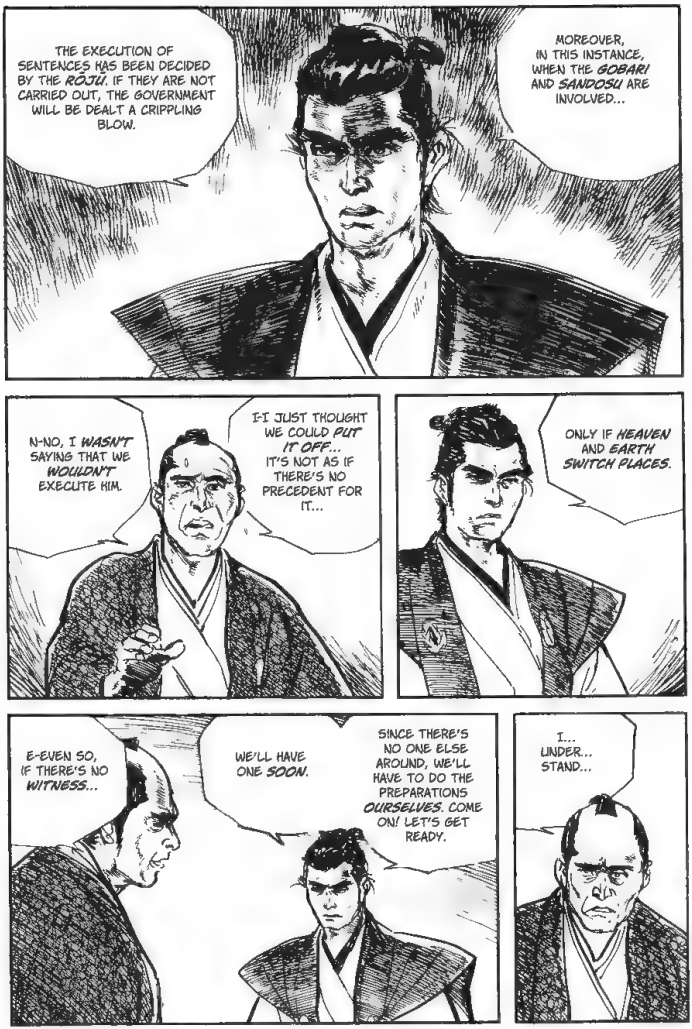
MAYBE NOBODY'S ANSWERING BECAUSE THE GUARDS AND CONSTABLES WEREN'T FEELING GOOD AND TOOK THE DAY OFF.

AS JINKICHI'S RELATIVE, IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO HIM, TELL ME.
NOBODY'S HERE BUT THE PRISON COMMISSIONER.
HOW CAN YOU EXECUTE MY BROTHER IF NO ONE'S THERE TO WITNESS IT?
YOU CAN BRAG ALL YOU WANT, BUT YOU CAN'T EXECUTE JINKICHI. WHY SHOULD I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TO A MAN WHO WON'T DIE?
SO YOU DON'T. FINE.


LOOKS LIKE THE COMMISSIONER WILL WITNESS THE EXECUTION *HIMSELF*.
DON'T MAKE ANY MORE NOISE, OR ELSE THE CONDEMNED WILL BE WHIPPED.

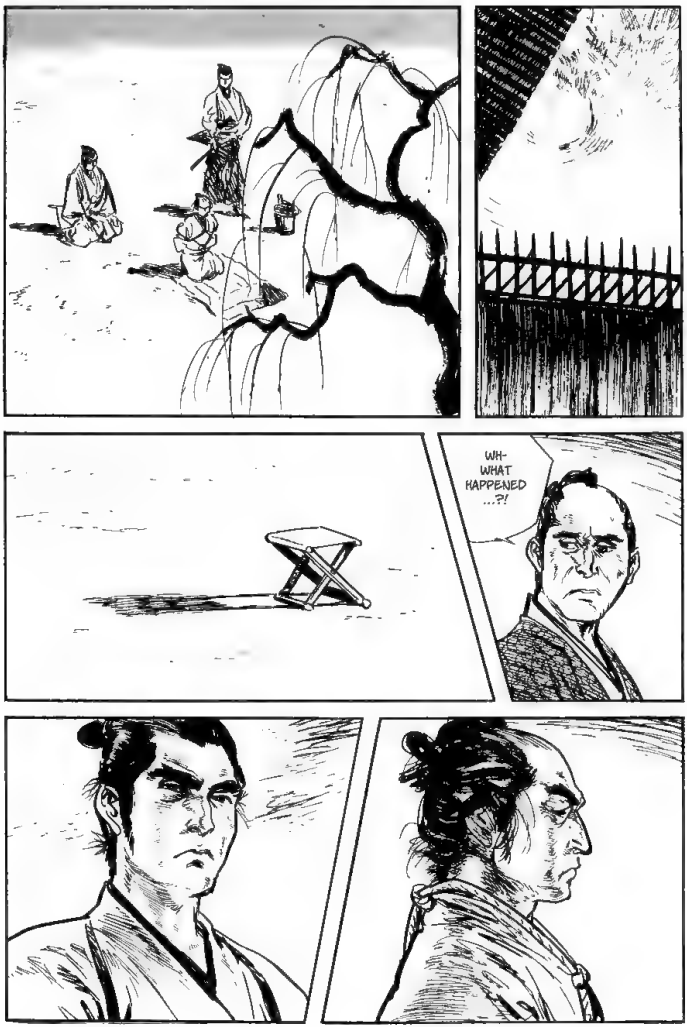


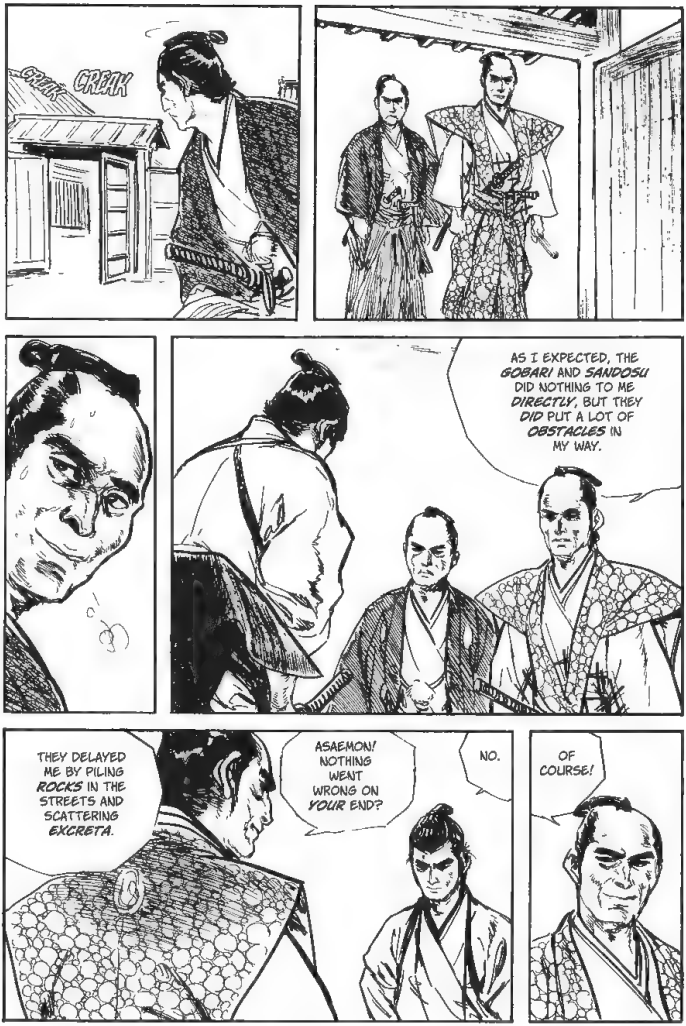
MOST OF THE MEN SAID THEY WERE *SICK* AND DIDN'T SHOW UP FOR WORK.
THE OTHERS SLIPPED IN SOME FOOD FOR THE PRISONERS AND THEN *TOOK OFF*.
IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT THE HIRED HELP WOULD DO THAT, BUT EVEN THE *CONSTABLES*...
I'VE HAD TO WATCH OVER THE PRISON *MYSELF*.
AT THIS RATE, IT'LL BE *IMPOSSIBLE* TO CARRY OUT AN EXECUTION...
WHAT SHOULD WE DO, YAMADA-*DONO*?
SHOULD WE CHANGE THE DATE AND *DELAY* THE EXECUTION?

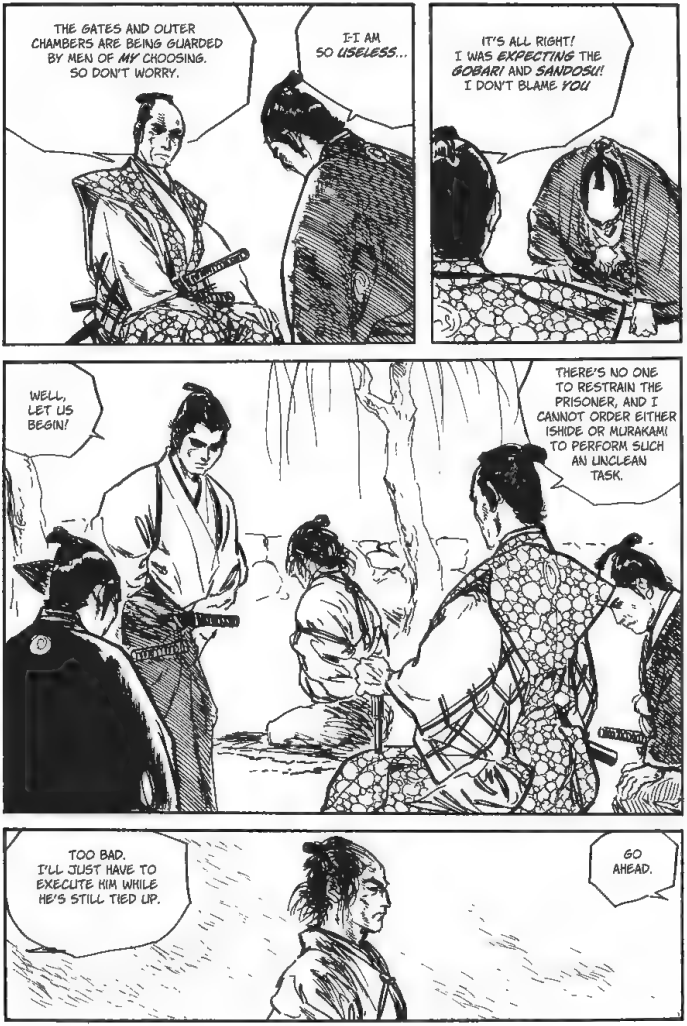

THE EXECUTION OF SENTENCES HAS BEEN DECIDED BY THE ROJU. IF THEY ARE NOT CARRIED OUT, THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE DEALT A CRIPPLING BLOW.
MOREOVER, IN THIS INSTANCE, WHEN THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU ARE INVOLVED...
N-NO, I WASN'T SAYING THAT WE WOULDN'T EXECUTE HIM.
I-I JUST THOUGHT WE COULD PUT IT OFF... IT'S NOT AS IF THERE'S NO PRECEDENT FOR IT...
ONLY IF HEAVEN AND EARTH SWITCH PLACES.
E-EVEN SO, IF THERE'S NO WITNESS...
WE'LL HAVE ONE SOON.
SINCE THERE'S NO ONE ELSE AROUND, WE'LL HAVE TO DO THE PREPARATIONS OURSELVES. COME ON! LET'S GET READY.
I... UNDER... STAND...

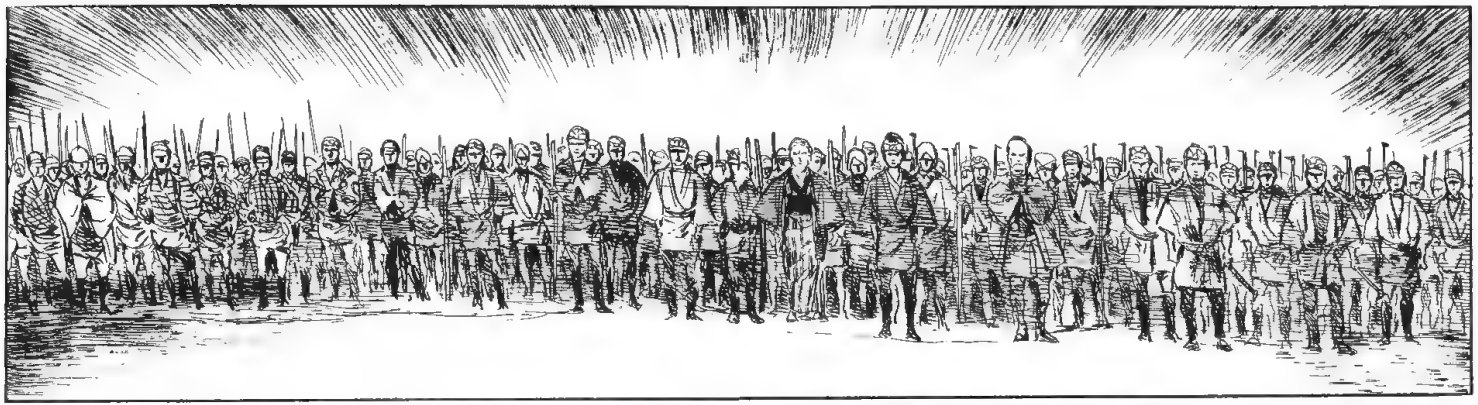
DON'T NEED ANY PAPER, HUH?

INOUE-SAMA...
HE'S LATE...


WH-
WHAT
HAPPENED
...?!


CREAK
CREAK
AS I EXPECTED, THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU DID NOTHING TO ME DIRECTLY, BUT THEY DID PUT A LOT OF OBSTACLES IN MY WAY.
THEY DELAYED ME BY PILING ROCKS IN THE STREETS AND SCATTERING EXCRETA.
ASAEMON! NOTHING WENT WRONG ON YOUR END?
NO.
OF COURSE!


THE GATES AND OUTER CHAMBERS ARE BEING GUARDED BY MEN OF MY CHOOSING. SO DON'T WORRY.
I-I AM SO USELESS...
IT'S ALL RIGHT! I WAS EXPECTING THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU!! I DON'T BLAME YOU
WELL, LET US BEGIN!
THERE'S NO ONE TO RESTRAIN THE PRISONER, AND I CANNOT ORDER EITHER ISHIDE OR MURAKAMI TO PERFORM SUCH AN UNCLEAN TASK.
TOO BAD. I'LL JUST HAVE TO EXECUTE HIM WHILE HE'S STILL TIED UP.
GO AHEAD.



CAN YA CUT ME?

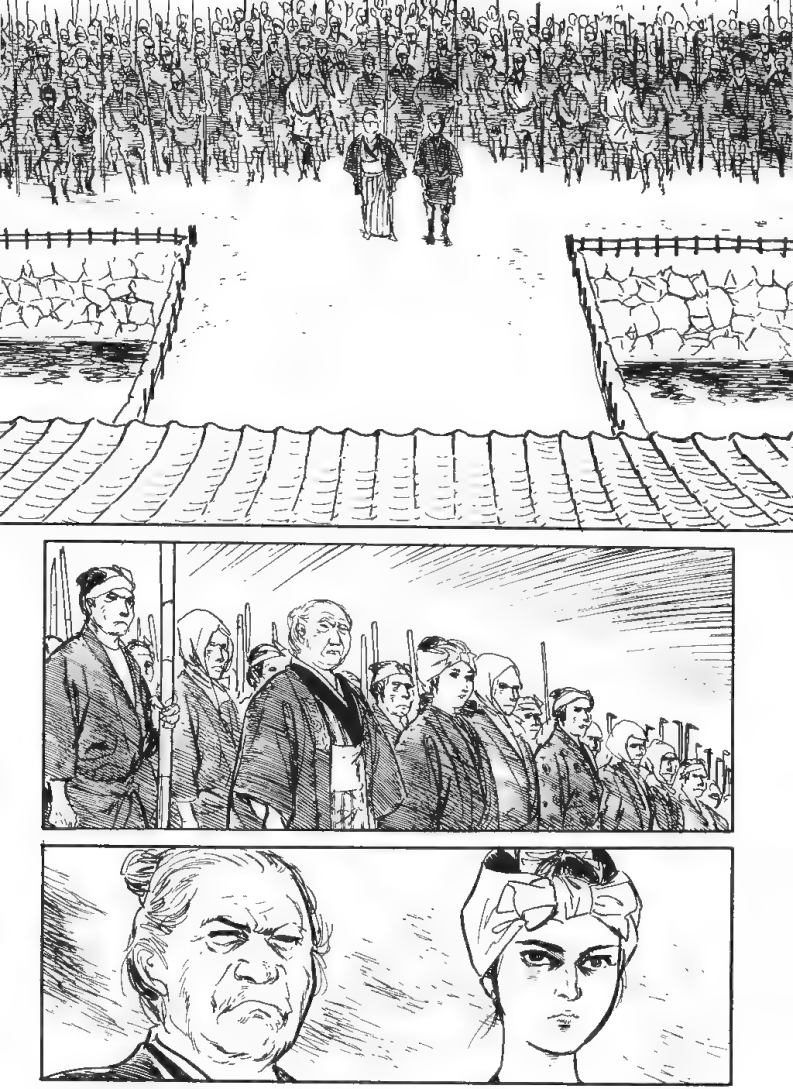
BSHHHH!!
BISSS!

DBZHHH!

AAARGH!!

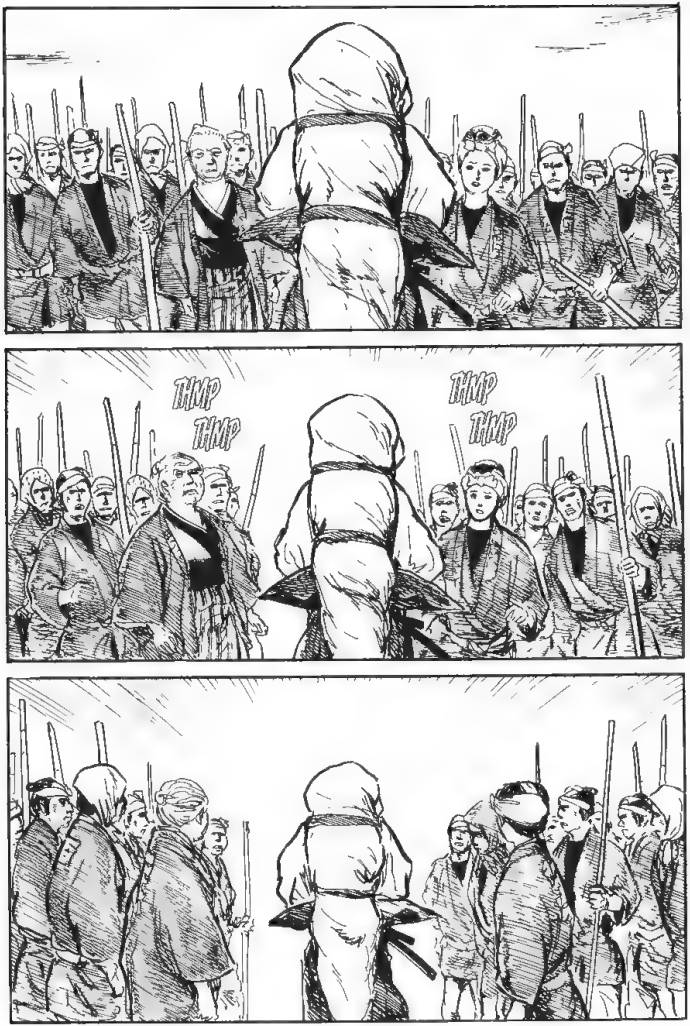
E-EXCELLENT.
SINCE NONE OF THE WORKERS ARE HERE, THERE'S NO ONE AROUND TO TAKE CARE OF THE CORPSE.
I'LL DO IT

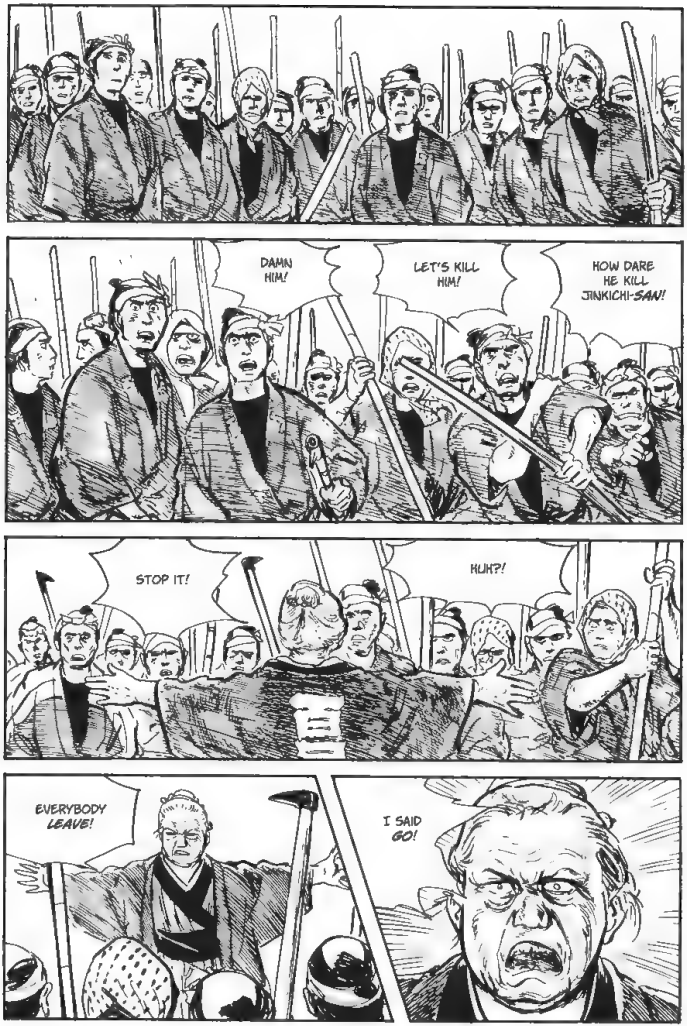
THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU HAVE ALL GANGED UP AND GATHERED OUTSIDE!
DAMN!
THEY DON'T EVEN FEAR THE GOVERNMENT! SUCH LAWLESS BEHAVIOR CAN'T BE FORGIVEN!
JUST A MOMENT!
THEY MAY BE GOBARI AND SANDOSU, BUT EVEN THEY WOULDN'T OPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT.
PERHAPS IT'S ME THEY'RE AFTER.
IF SO, COULD YOU LEAVE IT TO ME TO RESOLVE THIS?
ASAEMON!



ASSHOLES! IF THEY COME OUT, WE'RE GONNA ROLL 'EM UP IN MATS AND TOSS 'EM INTO THE RIVER!
WE'LL TEACH 'EM WHAT IT MEANS TO SCREW WITH THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU!
EVEN THE TOWN COMMISSIONER ONLY HAS MEN WHO SIT AROUND AND DO NOTHING! HERE COMES ONE NOW, CRINGIN'...
CREEEAK

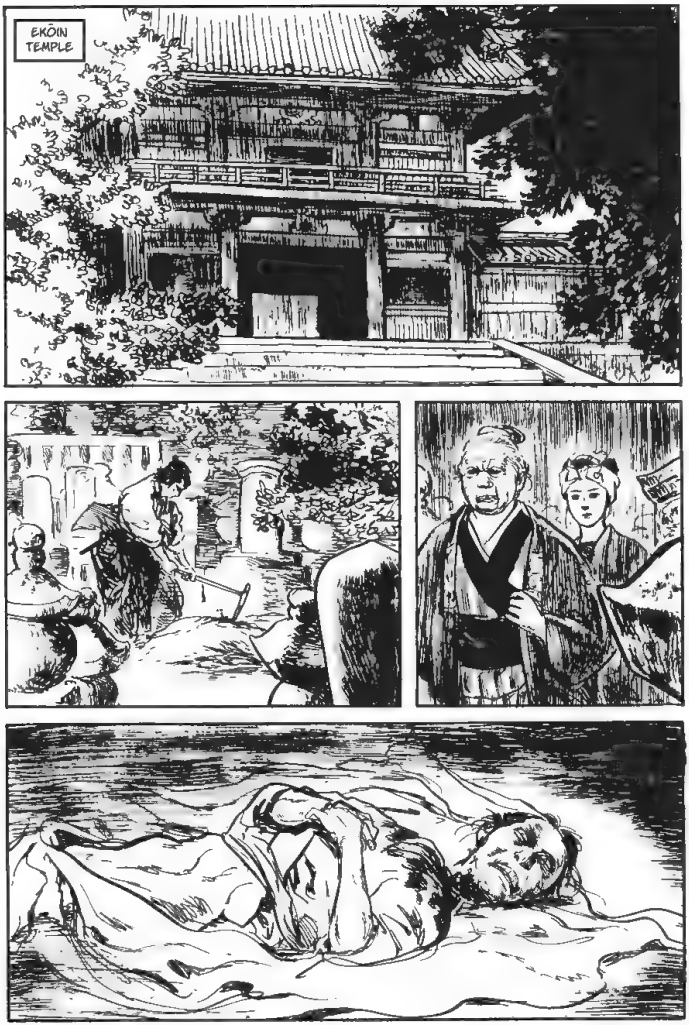
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP


THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP

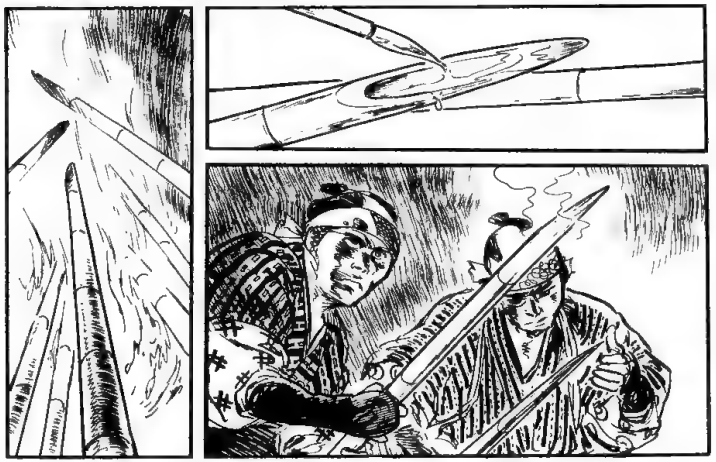

DAMN HIM!
LET'S KILL HIM!
HOW DARE HE KILL JINKICHI-SAN!
STOP IT!
HUH?!
EVERYBODY LEAVE!
I SAID GO!

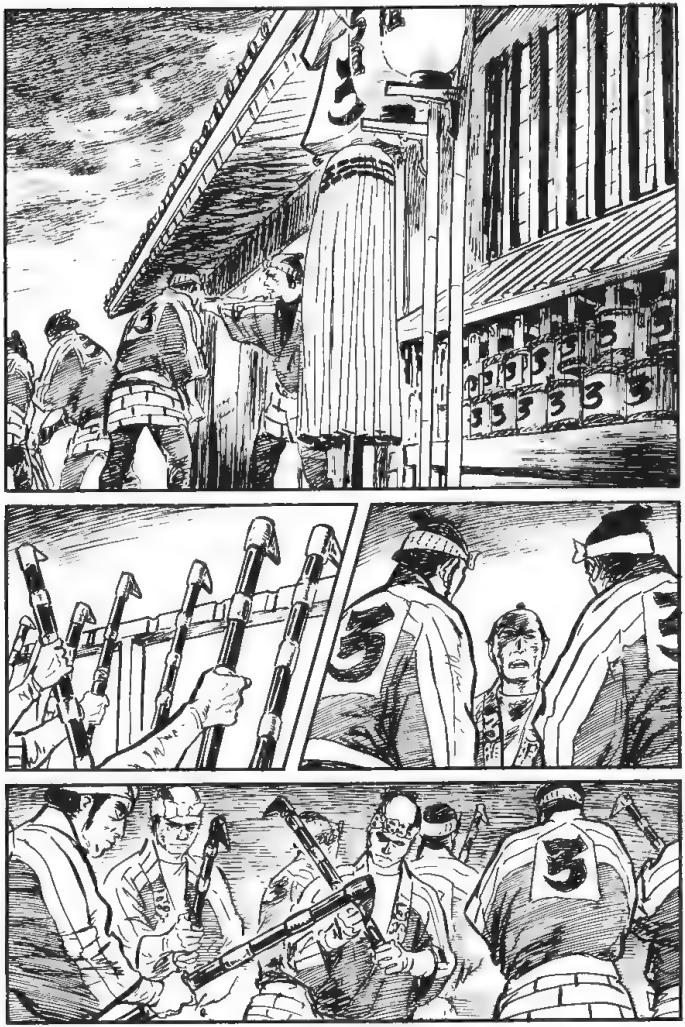
A RENOWNED SAMURAI RISKS HIS LIFE FOR THE HUMBLE SON OF A NIGHT SOIL COLLECTOR.
NO ROPE CAN MEASURE WHAT HE'S DOING.

NO ABACUS COULD HAVE CALCULATED IT.
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! COMPLETELY...
YET THAT SAMURAI IS CARRYING A CONDEMNED MAN'S CORPSE...
..THAT EVEN SERVANTS WOULDN'T WANT TO TOUCH.
THE BACK OF A SAMURAI SHIELDS HIS LORD FROM THEIR ENEMIES.
THE HAND OF A SAMURAI HOLDS A SWORD WITH A SOUL.
A CORPSE IS ON HIS BACK.. AND IT'S HEAD IS IN HIS HAND...
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE...
IMPOSSIBLE!
WE'VE LOST!


EKŌIN TEMPLE

JINKICHI!!!
OH, JINKICHI!!!!



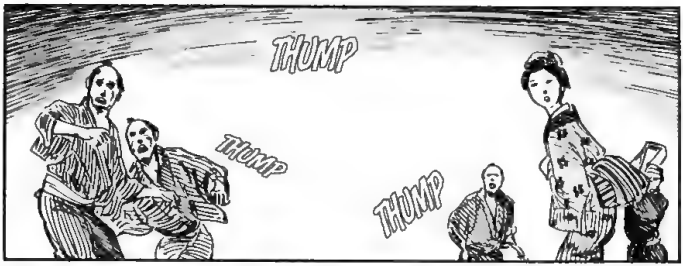


百足組
THE MYŌJIN CLAN'S GONE MAD!

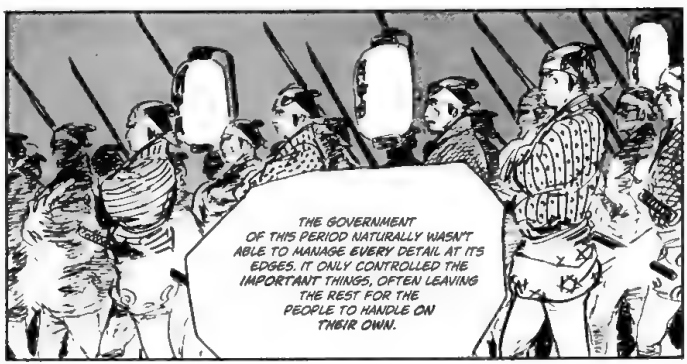
M-MOTHER!
TH-THE MURASAME CLAN'S COMIN'!
A-AN' THE KAKIDAYA AN' THE RO GROUP!
M-MOTHER!
THEY'RE BEYOND MY CONTROL BY NOW.
THEY'RE AFTER HEAD-CHOPPER ASA. ISN'T THAT RIGHT?

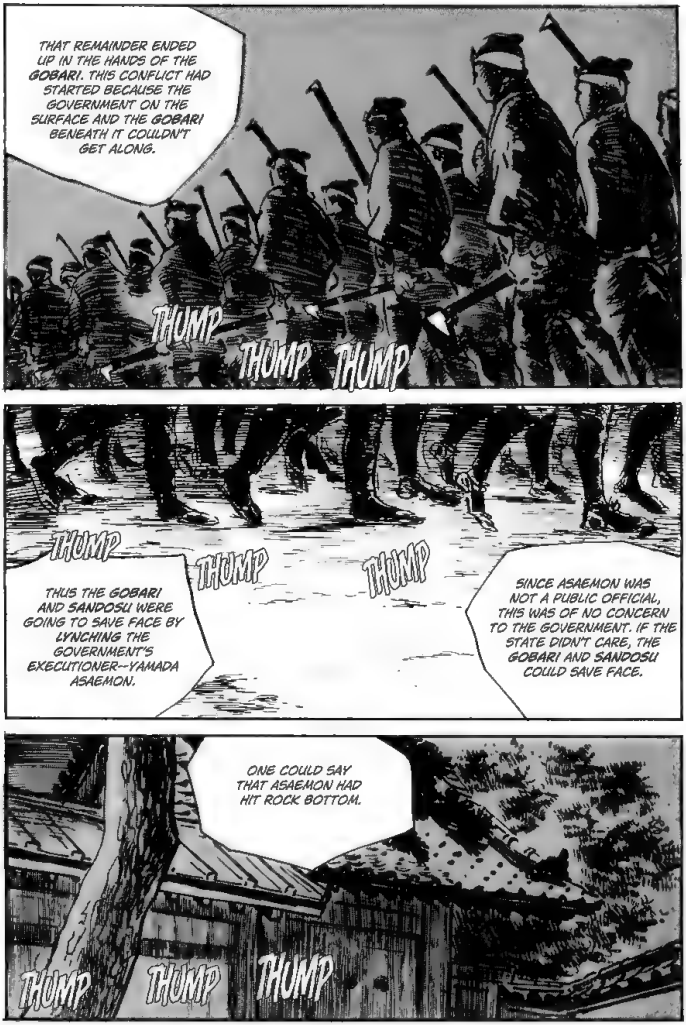
HUH?
EVERYONE WANTS TO AVENGE JINKICHI BY BEATING UP HEAD-CHOPPER ASA, BUT THAT'S ONLY ON THE *SURFACE*.
THAT MAY BE THE CASE, BUT HEAD-CHOPPER ASA DECAPITATED JINKICHI ON ORDERS FROM THE *GOVERNMENT*.
I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT IT'S JUST A GRUDGE.
BUT NONE OF THEM CAN HELP IT. IF IT WEREN'T HEAD-CHOPPER ASA THEY WERE AFTER, IT'D BE *SOMEBODY ELSE*. AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL IS THE GOVERNMENT'S ONE-SIDED VERDICT. THE *GOBARI* AND *SANDOSU* ARE USING IT AS AN EXCUSE TO SAVE FACE.
THAT'S WHY EVEN *I* CAN'T STOP THEM ALL.
S-SO THEN YAMADA-*SAMA*'LL BE IN A LOT OF...
AME, YOU'VE *FALLEN* FOR HIM... FOR *ASAEMON!*

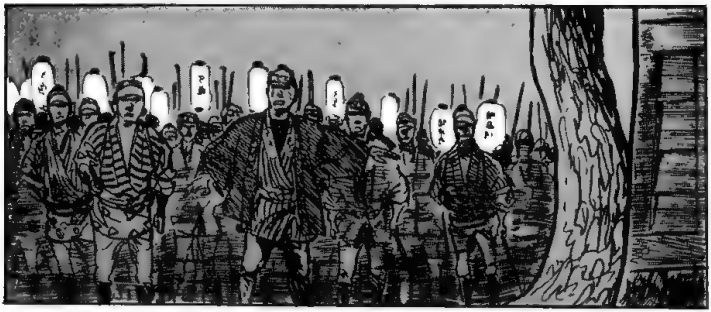
THAT'S IT! THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SOLVE ALL OUR PROBLEMS!


THUMP
THUMP
THUMP

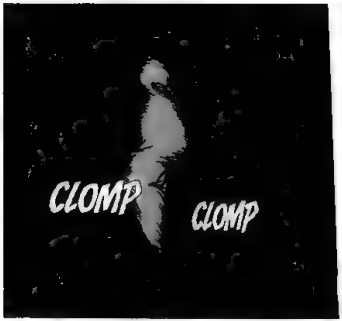
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
SOMETHING HAD GONE WRONG SOMEWHERE. ONE EXECUTIONER HAD BEHEADED ONE CONDEMNED MAN. THAT WAS ALL. YET THIS TIME THERE WAS SOMETHING AMISS.


THE GOVERNMENT OF THIS PERIOD NATURALLY WASN'T ABLE TO MANAGE EVERY DETAIL AT ITS EDGES. IT ONLY CONTROLLED THE IMPORTANT THINGS, OFTEN LEAVING THE REST FOR THE PEOPLE TO HANDLE ON THEIR OWN.

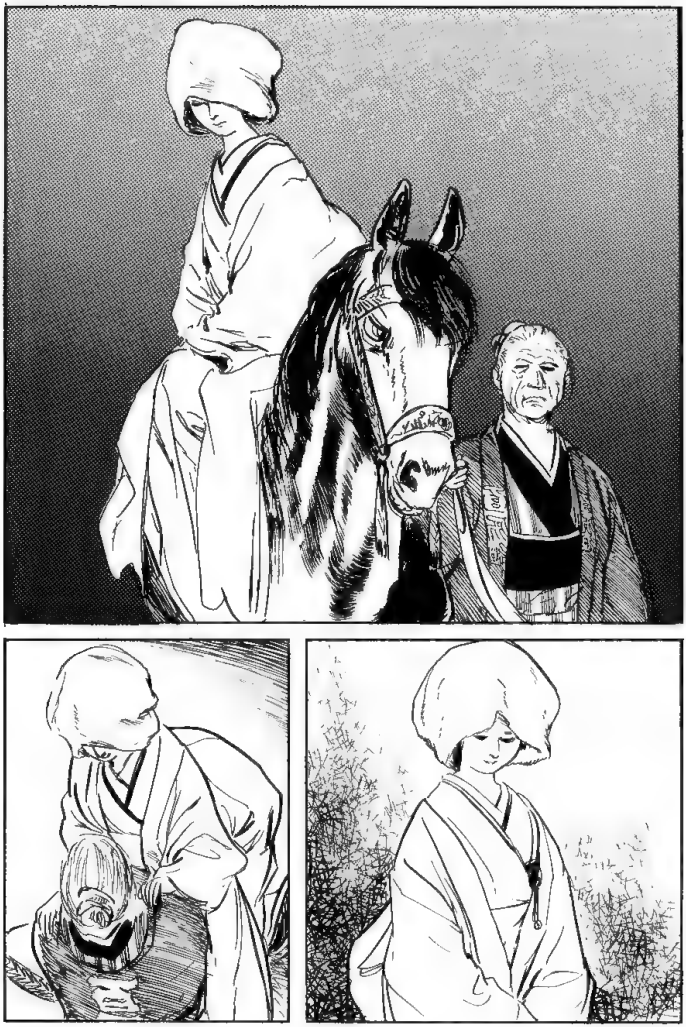

THAT REMAINDER ENDED UP IN THE HANDS OF THE GOBARI. THIS CONFLICT HAD STARTED BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT ON THE SURFACE AND THE GOBARI BENEATH IT COULDN'T GET ALONG.
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
THUS THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU WERE GOING TO SAVE FACE BY LYNCHING THE GOVERNMENT'S EXECUTIONER--YAMADA ASAEMON.
SINCE ASAEMON WAS NOT A PUBLIC OFFICIAL, THIS WAS OF NO CONCERN TO THE GOVERNMENT. IF THE STATE DIDN'T CARE, THE GOBARI AND SANDOSU COULD SAVE FACE.
ONE COULD SAY THAT ASAEMON HAD HIT ROCK BOTTOM.
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP



CLOMP
CLOMP


CLOMP
CLOMP

CLOMP
CLOMP

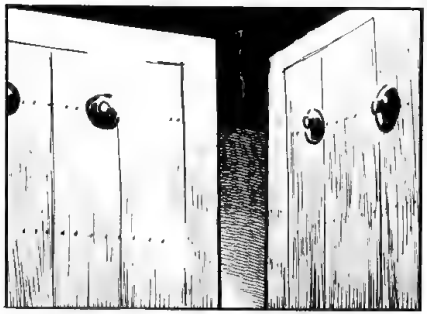


O-TOME!
WH-WHAT'S GOIN' ON?!
山田
EXCUSE ME! I'VE BROUGHT YOU A BRIDE!
KNOCK
KNOCK
EXCUSE ME!
KNOCK
KNOCK
CREEEEAK

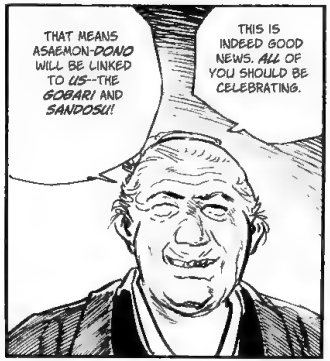
THIS IS A NIGHT FOR A *WEDDING!* IT'S WARM, QUIET, AND *PEACEFUL.*
CREEEAK

諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅爲樂
YOU MUST BE IN SHOCK! THEY SAY ONE SHOULD TIE THE KNOT WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY ARISES.
WILL YOU LOVE MY YOUNGEST DAUGHTER AME TO THE VERY END?
ALTHOUGH I AM NOT WORTHY, PLEASE LET ME BE AT YOUR SIDE.
THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THOSE GUYS OUTSIDE! THIS GIRL HAS REALLY FALLEN FOR YOU! AS HER PARENT, I WANTED HER TO MARRY THE MAN SHE FEELS FOR THAT'S ALL.

SO! WILL YOU TAKE HER HAND IN MARRIAGE? IF YOU WON'T, WE'LL JUST LEAVE IT AT THAT.
IF YOU WANT SOMEONE LIKE *ME*, THEN I SHALL INDEED MARRY YOUR DAUGHTER.
R...
...*REALLY*...?!
A *WARRIOR* KEEPS HIS *WORD*.



ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE!
BY CHANCE, IT TURNS OUT THAT MY DAUGHTER AME WILL BE MARRYING THE LORD OF THIS HOUSE, YAMADA ASAEMON.


THIS IS INDEED GOOD NEWS. ALL OF YOU SHOULD BE CELEBRATING.
THAT MEANS ASAEMON-*DONO* WILL BE LINKED TO *US*--THE *GOBARI* AND *SANDOSU*!!

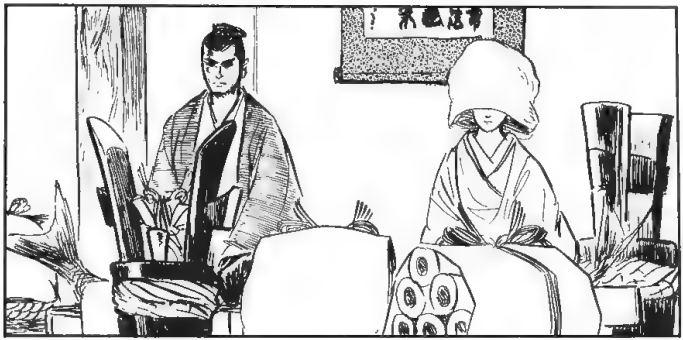
A-ARE YOU *SERIOUS*, O-TOME?
DIDN'T YOU SEE AME IN HER *BRIDAL DRESS*?

B-BUT...HOW COULD AME-SAN MARRY ASAEMON, THE MAN WHO KILLED JINKICHI-SAN?
JINKICHI MUST BE TURNIN' IN HIS GRAVE!
ASAEMON EXECUTED JINKICHI AND COURTEOUSLY BURIED HIM. THAT IS WHY THERE IS NO OTHER MAN FOR HER.
DOES ANYONE OBJECT?!

LET'S HAVE AN IMPROMPTU WEDDING! EVERYBODY CELEBRATE!
ALL RIGHT?

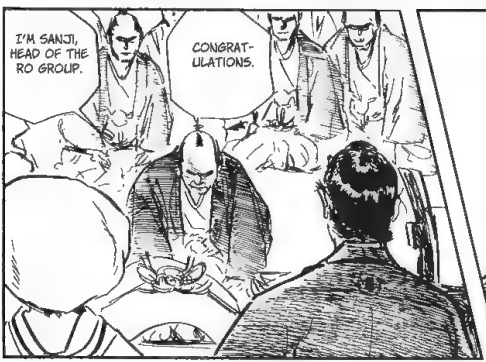
OH, THIS IS GREAT! *GREAT!*
THE *FINEST* BRIDEGROOM IN THE THREE LANDS HAS JOINED THE *GOBARI* AND *SANDOSU*!!
NOW *EVERYTHING*'S RESOLVED.
THIS IS REALLY SUCH A *WONDERFUL* MOMENT! JINKICHI CAN ACHIEVE *BUDDHAHOOD*!
TRULY SUCH A WONDERFUL MOMENT...

ONE MOMENT, I'M PREPARING FOR A FIGHT, AND THE NEXT, I'M PREPARING FOR A WEDDING!
MY HEAD'S SPINNIN'!
IT'S CAUSE SHE'S GONNA MARRY THE GUY WE JUST TRIED TO KILL!
BUT THERE'S NO DOUBT THIS IS A JOYOUS OCCASION. LET'S CELEBRATE THEIR WEDDING!
BY HOOKING HIMSELF UP WITH US, HE'S RECOGNIZED THE POWER OF THE GOBARI AND THE SANDOSU AND SUBMITTED TO IT.
THAT SEEMS TO BE WHAT THE WORLD THINKS. OUR REPUTATION'S BEEN SAVED!
WE CAN COUNT ON O-TOME. IF WE HAD KILLED ASA, WE'D HAVE GOTTEN IN TROUBLE WITH THE GOVERNMENT! BY PRESSURING HER DAUGHTER TO MARRY HIM, SHE SOLVED EVERYTHING, KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE.
WELL... A MAN LIKE HEAD-CHOPPER ASA'S PERFECT FOR HER!
AND AME'S NOT BAD FOR HIM EITHER.
SO THIS IS THE CALM AFTER THE STORM!

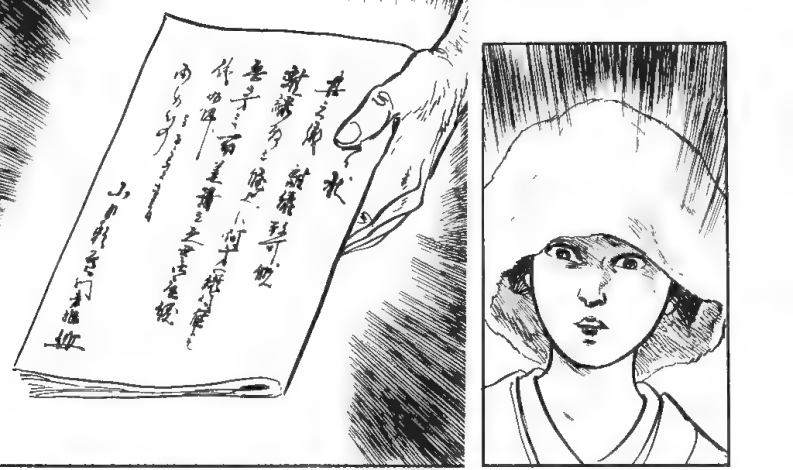


CONGRAT-
ULATIONS.
I AM
TATSUGÔRO
OF THE
MYÔJIN
CLAN.

THIS IS
TRULY A
FESTIVE
OCCASION.
PLEASE
ACCEPT
THIS FLORAL
ARRANGEMENT
FROM THE
MURASAMA
CLAN.

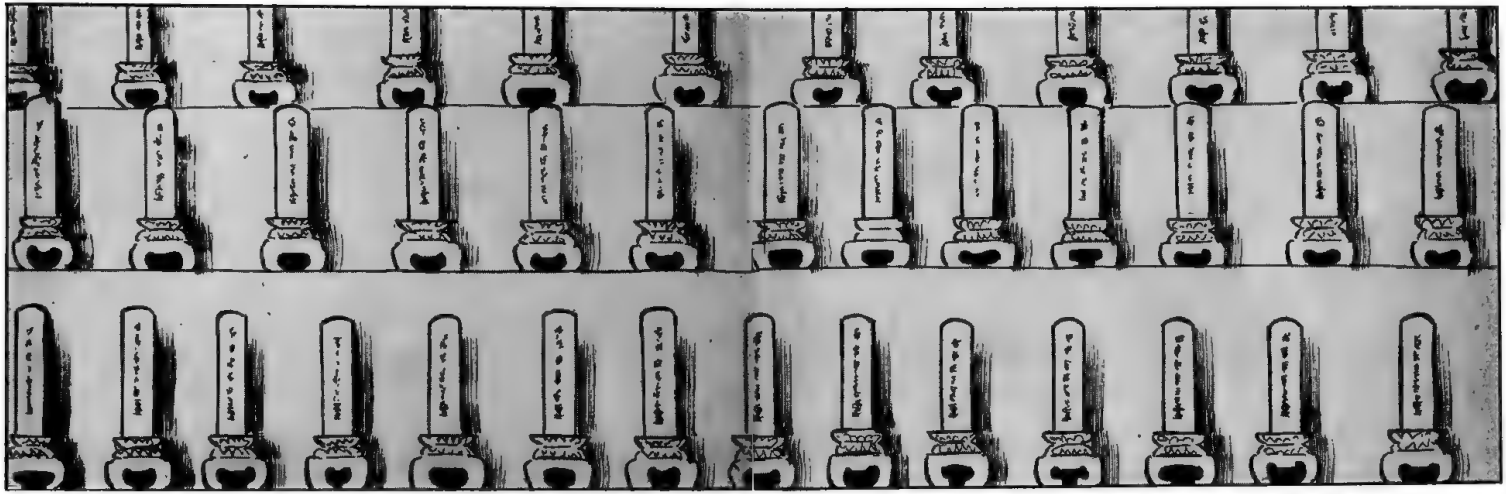

I'M SANJI,
HEAD OF THE
RO GROUP.
CONGRAT-
ULATIONS.

CLNK
AME...
Y-YES!
I'M DIVORCING YOU.

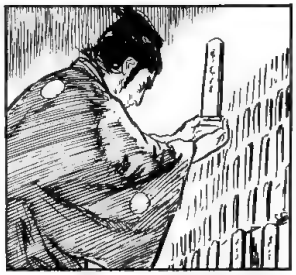


WE'RE SEPAR-ATING.
WH... WHAT...

I WILL NEVER MARRY. THE ONLY WOMAN THAT I WILL EVER CALL "MY WIFE"...
IS YOU.
PLEASE UNDERSTAND.
IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU THAT THIS ENDED WITHOUT BLOODSHED...WITH ME STILL IN ONE PIECE. YOU ARE THE ONLY WOMAN IN MY ENTIRE LIFE WHO IS WORTHY TO BE MY WIFE.
B-BUT WHY CAN'T I BE BY YOUR SIDE?

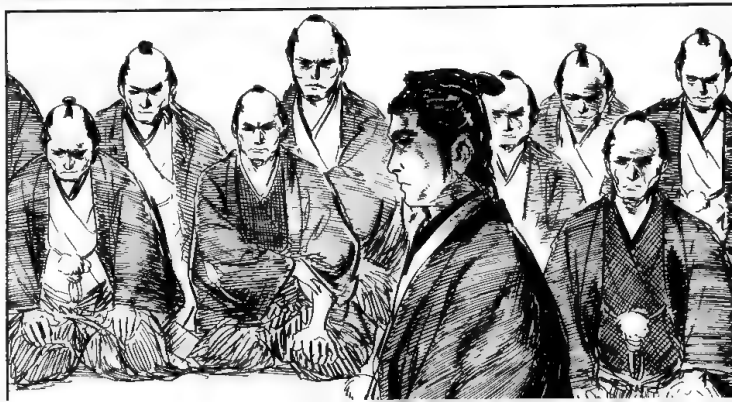


THESE TABLETS ARE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE I HAVE EXECUTED UNTIL NOW



TH-THAT'S...
JINKICHI'S...

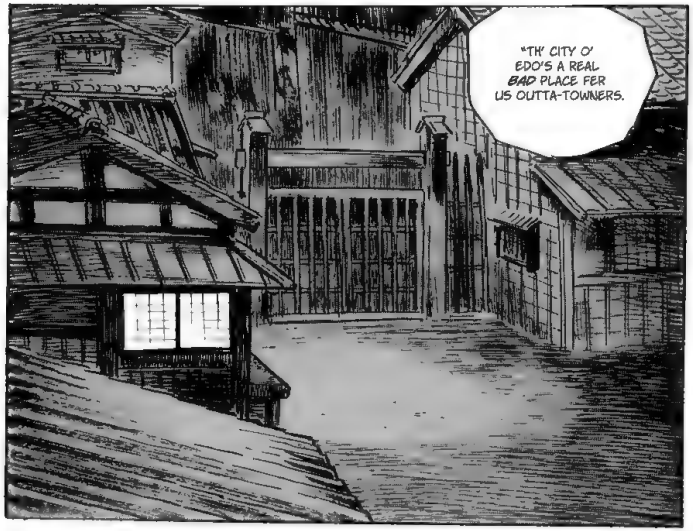
IF I TAKE A WIFE, A NEW LIFE WILL BE BORN.
HOW CAN ONE WHO *TAKES* LIVES *CREATE* LIFE?



THAT'S WHY I CAN ONLY HAVE A WIFE IN *SPIRIT*.

the twenty-four

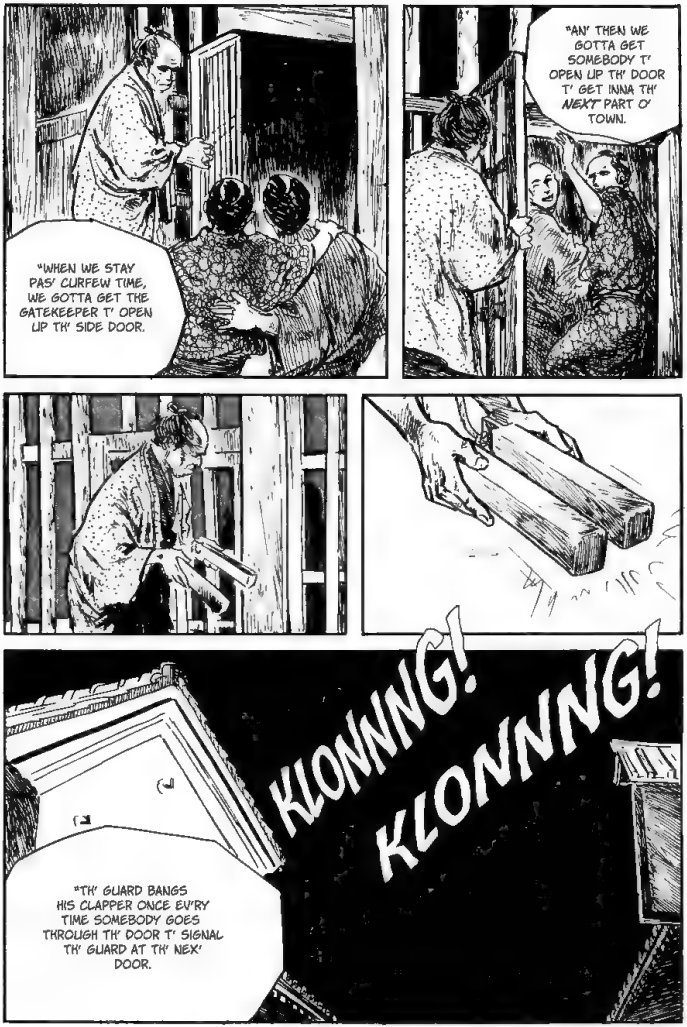
To be a Sunflower


"TH' CITY O' EDO'S A REAL *BAD* PLACE FER US OUTTA-TOWNERS.

"SPECIALLY FER US *HOMELESS*.

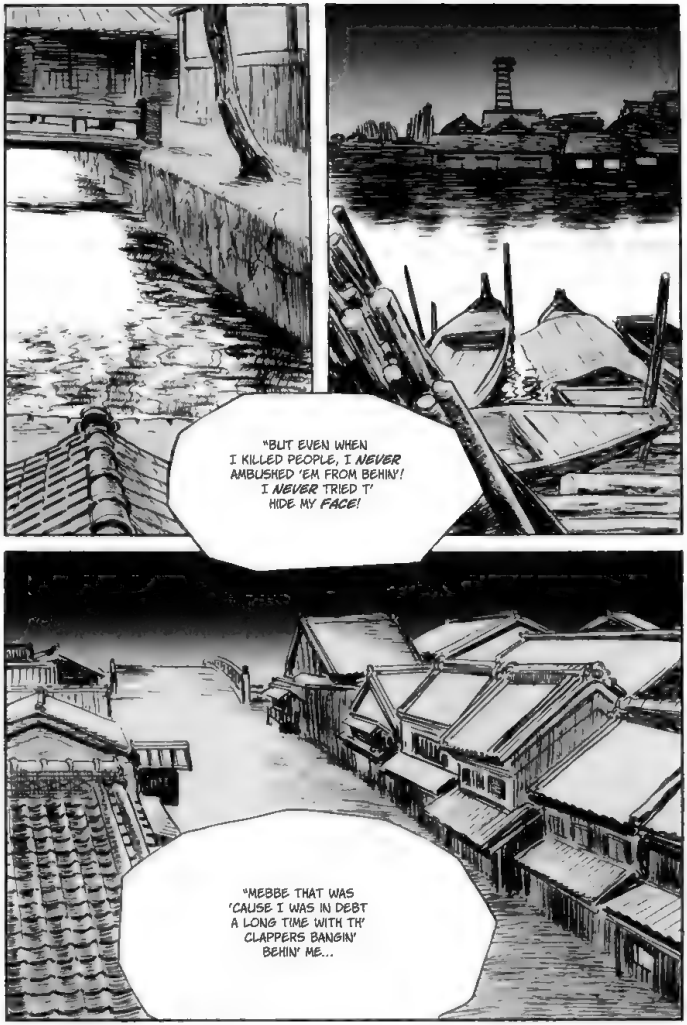
"EV'RY PART O' TOWN'S GOT A *GATE*.

"TH' GATES *CLOSE* AT TH' HOUR O' THE BOAR.


"WHEN WE STAY PAS' CURFEW TIME, WE GOTTA GET THE GATEKEEPER T' OPEN UP TH' SIDE DOOR.
"AN' THEN WE GOTTA GET SOMEBODY T' OPEN UP TH' DOOR T' GET INNA TH' NEXT PART O' TOWN.
KLONNNG!
KLONNNG!
"TH' GUARD BANGS HIS CLAPPER ONCE EV'RY TIME SOMEBODY GOES THROUGH TH' DOOR T' SIGNAL TH' GUARD AT TH' NEX' DOOR.

"I HATED THAT.
"IF A GUARD THOUGHT I WAS JUS' A LITTLE SUSPICIOUS...
"HE WOULDN'T OPEN TH' DOOR FER ME.
"WHEN I SUCKED UP T' HIM AND THOUGHT I'D GET THROUGH...

"HE'D BANG HIS CLAPPERS.
KLONNG!
"EVEN IF I DIDN' DO *NOTHIN'* WRONG, I'D FEEL I *OWED* HIM SOMETHIN', JUS' 'CAUSE I WAS A HOMELESS GUY FROM OUTTA TOWN.
"EVEN THOUGH I *KNEW* HE WAS GONNA BANG 'EM, THE SOUN' WOULD STILL REALLY *GET* T' ME.
"AND THAT NOISE WAS *BEHIND* ME! I *HATED* THAT!
"*NOT* THAT I'M BLAMIN' THE CLAPPERS FER ME TURNIN' BAD O' ANYTHIN'.


"BUT EVEN WHEN I KILLED PEOPLE, I NEVER AMBUSHED 'EM FROM BEHIN'! I NEVER TRIED T' HIDE MY FACE!
"MEBBE THAT WAS 'CAUSE I WAS IN DEBT A LONG TIME WITH TH' CLAPPERS BANGIN' BEHIN' ME...

"EVEN IF A GUY WAS RUNNIN' AWAY, I'D CATCH UP T' HIM...
"AN' STAB HIM *FACE T' FACE.*"

MEBBE THASS HOW I GOT T' BE CALLED TH' SUNFLOWER...
WHEN I DIE, I JUS' DON' WANNA GET IT IN THE BACK.

I WISH WITH ALL MUH HEART THAT IF I COULD LIVE MUH LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN, I'D WANNA BE ABLE T' LIVE RIGHT SO'S I CAN FACE TH' SUN.
THASS WHAT I WANNA BE! A REAL SUNFLOWER!
YA ASKED ME IF I GOT ANY LAS' WORDS, AN' I'VE BEEN RAMBLIN' TOO LONG, BUT I WANNA DIE FACIN' TH' SUN!
I BEG YA, PLEASE!

BZHHH!

the twenty-fifth

Penpen Grass

D...D...DAMN YOU, HEADCHOPPER ASA...! I...I'LL BE REBORN SEVEN TIMES...AN'... I...I...I'LL MAKE YER ROOF GROW... PENPEN GRASS...!
SH-SHIT! D... D... DAMN YOU!

I'LL MAKE YER ROOF GROW
PENPEN GRASS!

BHT
RIIP

HEADCHOPPER'S SON!
PENPEN GRASS'S GROWIN' ON YER ROOF..!
HEADCHOPPER'S SON...!
PENPEN GRASS'S GROWIN' ON YER ROOF...!
PENPEN GRASS'S GROWIN'...!

HEY, HEADCHOPPER'S SON...!
山田
YAMADA
HEADCHOPPER'S SON...!
HEADCHOPPER'S SON...!
PENPEN GRASS'S GROWIN' ON YER ROOF...!

PENPEN GRASS'S GROWIN ON YER ROOF...!
THAT'S WHY WE AIN'T GONNA PLAY WITH YA!
WE DON'T PLAY WITH NO KIDS WHOSE HOUSES GOT PENPEN GRASS!
YAMADA

KTUK
FATHER!

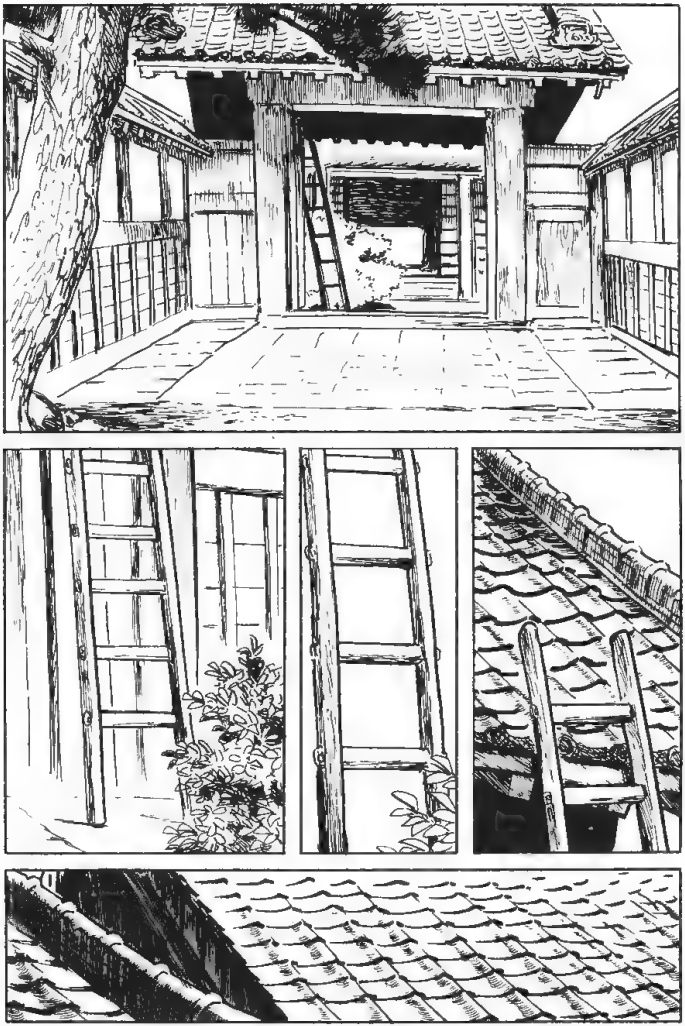
WHAT?
WHAT KIND OF GRASS IS *PENPEN* GRASS?
YOU MEAN *NAZUNA!* IT'S ALSO CALLED *SHAMISEN* GRASS.
WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?
THEY SAY MY HEAD-CHOPPING DAD'S HOUSE HAS *PENPEN* GRASS GROWING ON IT.
WHO'S "THEY"?
THE NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS SAY THAT
THEY ALL SAY THEY WON'T PLAY WITH A KID FROM A HOUSE WITH *PENPEN* GRASS GROWING ON IT.

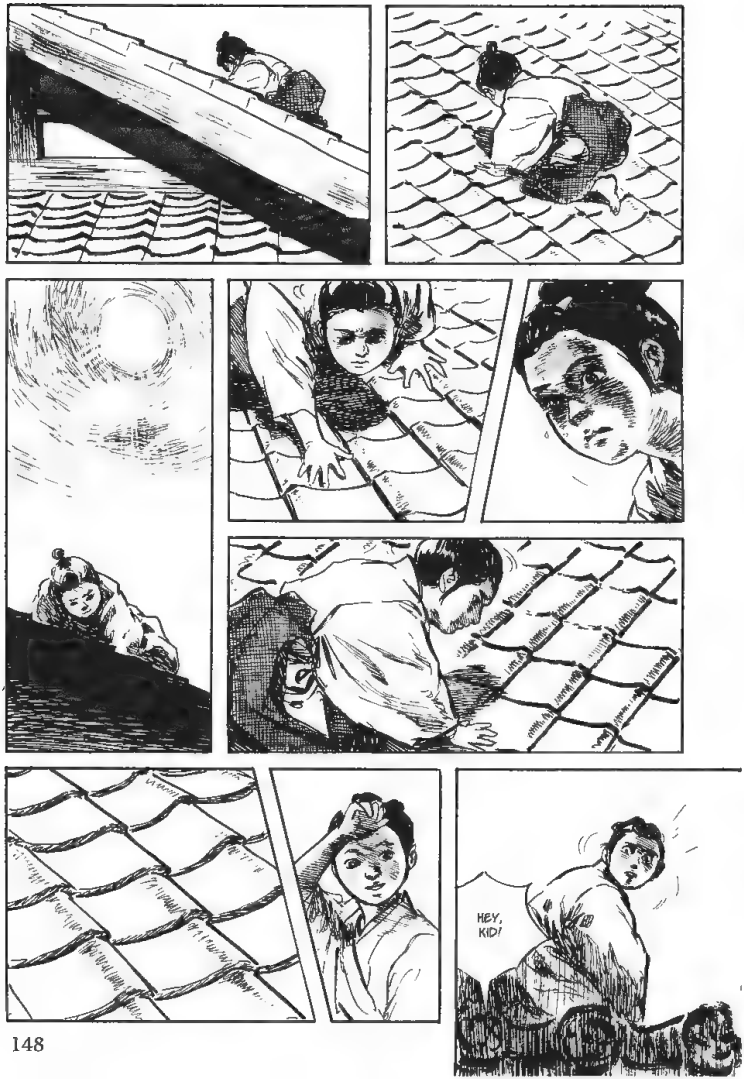
DO YOU WANT TO PLAY WITH THOSE CHILDREN?
NO.
SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
I WANT TO KNOW WHY
GRASS GROWS WHEREVER THERE'S EARTH AND WATER. THAT'S A LAW OF NATURE.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR AN INVESTIGATION.
DON'T THINK ABOUT SUCH NONSENSE WHEN YOU EAT!
I WON'T!

HUH ?!
THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT YOU TO TELL ME.
OH! AND WHAT IS IT?!
ONCE YOU'VE PAID MY FEE, YOU'RE MY CUSTOMER. I CAN TELL YOU ANYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW!
I DON'T JUST READ FORTUNES FROM FACES OR PALMS. THERE'S NOTHING UNDER THE HEAVENS OR ON THIS EARTH THAT I DON'T KNOW.
WHAT KIND OF GRASS IS PENPEN GRASS?
PENPEN GRASS, HUH?! HMPH! YOU ASK STRANGE QUESTIONS, KID!
SO IS IT OKAY FOR YOU TO TELL ME?
PENPEN GRASS IS ALSO KNOWN AS SHAMISEN GRASS OR NAZUNA. IT GROWS NATURALLY IN THE WILD AND ON THE ROADSIDE ALL YEAR LONG. IT SPROUTS LEAVES LIKE FEATHERS AND ITS WHITE FLOWERS BLOOM IN CLUSTERS IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER.

IS IT BAD FOR *PENPEN* GRASS TO GROW?
IT'S *CURSED* GRASS!
TRUE TO ITS *OTHER* NAME~ *UNLUCKY GRASS*~ IT IS ALSO *FULL* OF THE *GRUDGES* OF MEN.
WHEN A MAN *DIES*, HE'LL TELL THE OBJECT OF HIS GRUDGE THAT HE'LL GROW *PENPEN* GRASS... AND BY THAT HE MEANS...
...THAT THE *OBJECT* OF HIS GRUDGE...
...AND HIS *FAMILY* WILL *DIE OFF*, AND THAT THEIR HOUSE WILL FALL INTO *RUIN* AND BE *CURSED* BY *PENPEN* GRASS.

HAH! THERE'S SOME RIGHT HERE!
THIS IS PENPEN GRASS. JUST AS THE NAME SHAMISEN GRASS SUGGESTS, IT LOOKS LIKE A SHAMISEN PICK.
PEOPLE WHO DIE BEARING GRUDGES...
...VENT ALL THEIR SPITE THROUGH THE SOUND OF A SHAMISEN MAKING A PENPEN NOISE... AND THAT IS WHY PENPEN GRASS--SHAMISEN GRASS--IS UNLUCKY GRASS.
IF PENPEN GRASS IS GROWING ON THE ROOF OF A HOUSE...
...THEN THAT HOUSE IS CURSED!



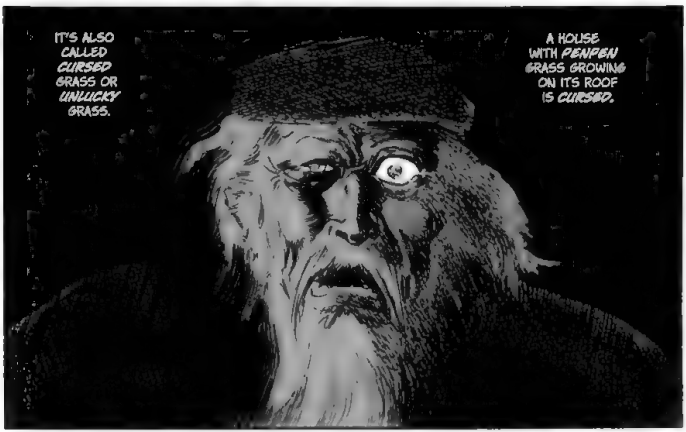

HEY, KID!

WHATCHA DOIN'?
PENPEN GRASS GROWIN' UP THERE?
WE DON'T NEED ANY.
YOU WANT ANYTHING TODAY? GOT A LOTTA FRESH FISH WITH ME.
WELL, 'TIL NEXT TIME! THANKS!

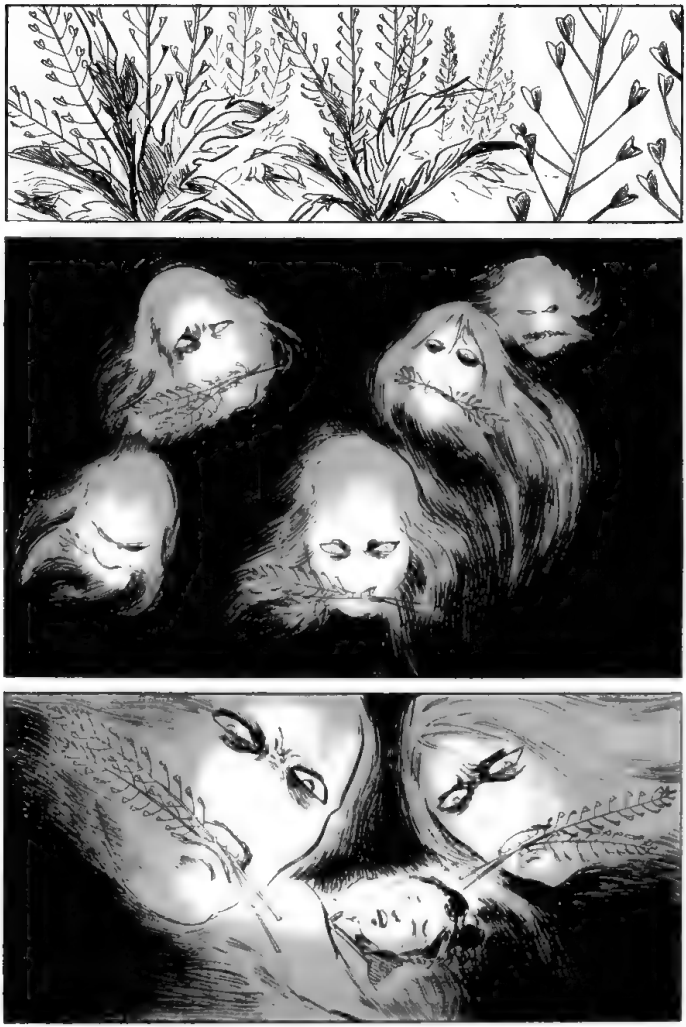
YAMADA

HEADCHOPPER'S SON!
PENPEN GRASS'S GROWIN' ON YER ROOF!

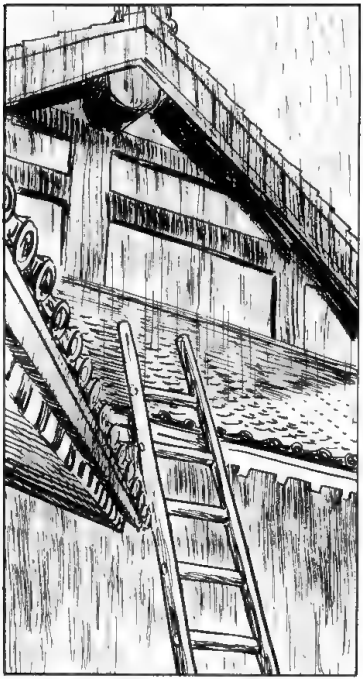
WE DON'T PLAY WITH NO KIDS
WHOSE HOUSES GOT PENPEN GRASS!

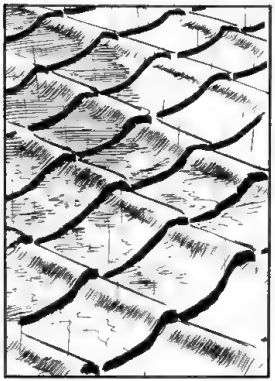

IT'S ALSO CALLED CURSED GRASS OR UNLUCKY GRASS.
A HOUSE WITH PENPEN GRASS GROWING ON ITS ROOF IS CURSED.

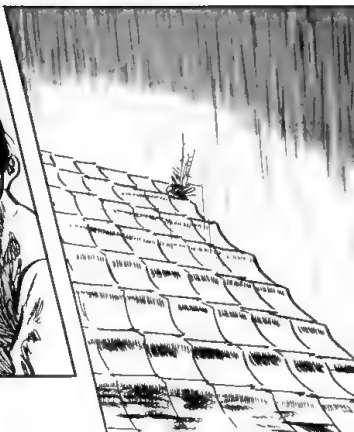
PEOPLE WHO GO TO THEIR DEATHS WITH GRUDGES VENT ALL THEIR SPITE THROUGH THE SOUND OF A SHAMISEN MAKING A PEANPEAN NOISE— AND THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED PEANPEAN GRASS OR SHAMISEN GRASS.
IT'S CURSED.
IT'S CURSED



OHKH...
OHKH...
OHKH...
WHEW







YOSHITSUGU! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

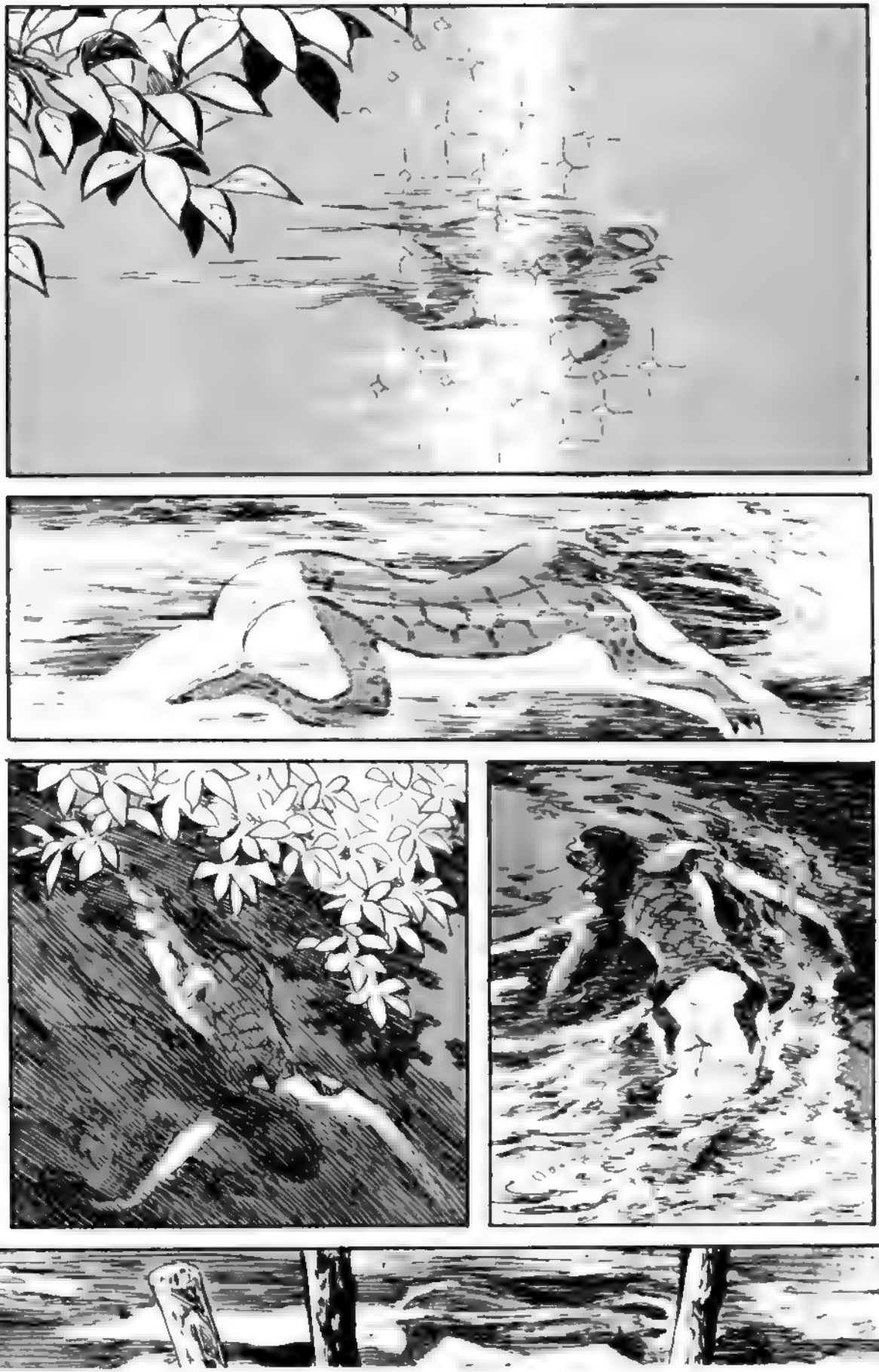
SSSUP!
AHHH!
WHUMP!
SSSS!

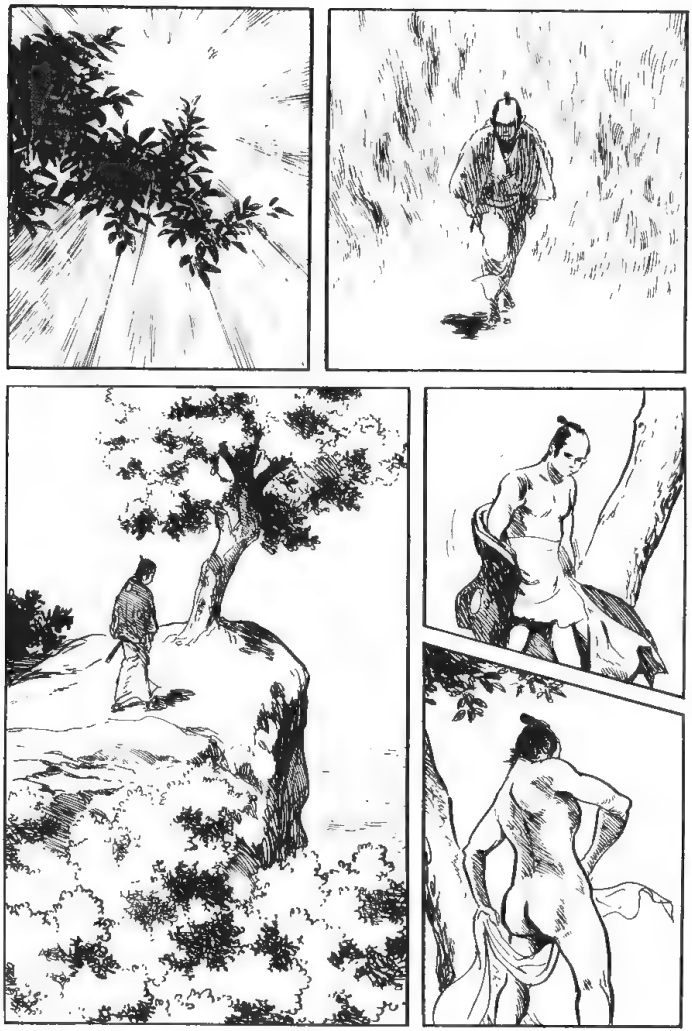
SEEMS LIKE HIS VITALS ARE OKAY. DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ANYTHING'S UNUSUAL...
BUT HE WON'T STOP BLEEDING...
IF HE DOESN'T STOP BLEEDING WITHIN AN HOUR...
HUH?!

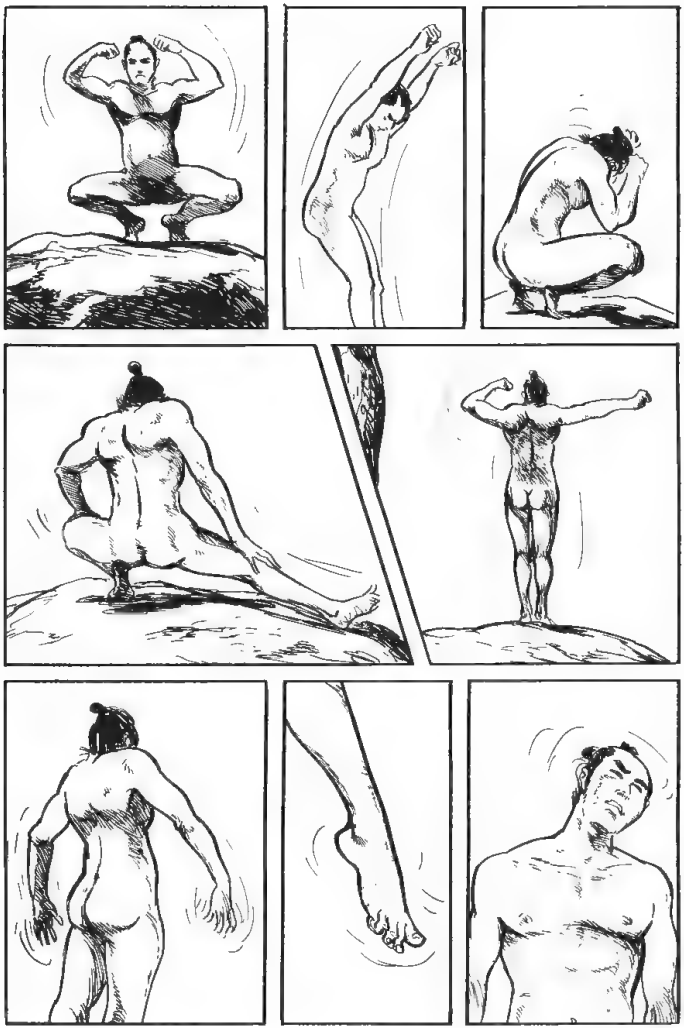
I SEE YOU'RE VERY WELL *PREPARED*. BOIL THAT *NAZUNA* AND GIVE IT TO THE BOY.
NAZUNA IS ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE FOR STOPPING THE FLOW OF BLOOD.
IT GROWS *EVERYWHERE* AND IS A *VALUABLE* MEDICINE BECAUSE IT SAVES *LIVES*.
TAKE CARE!

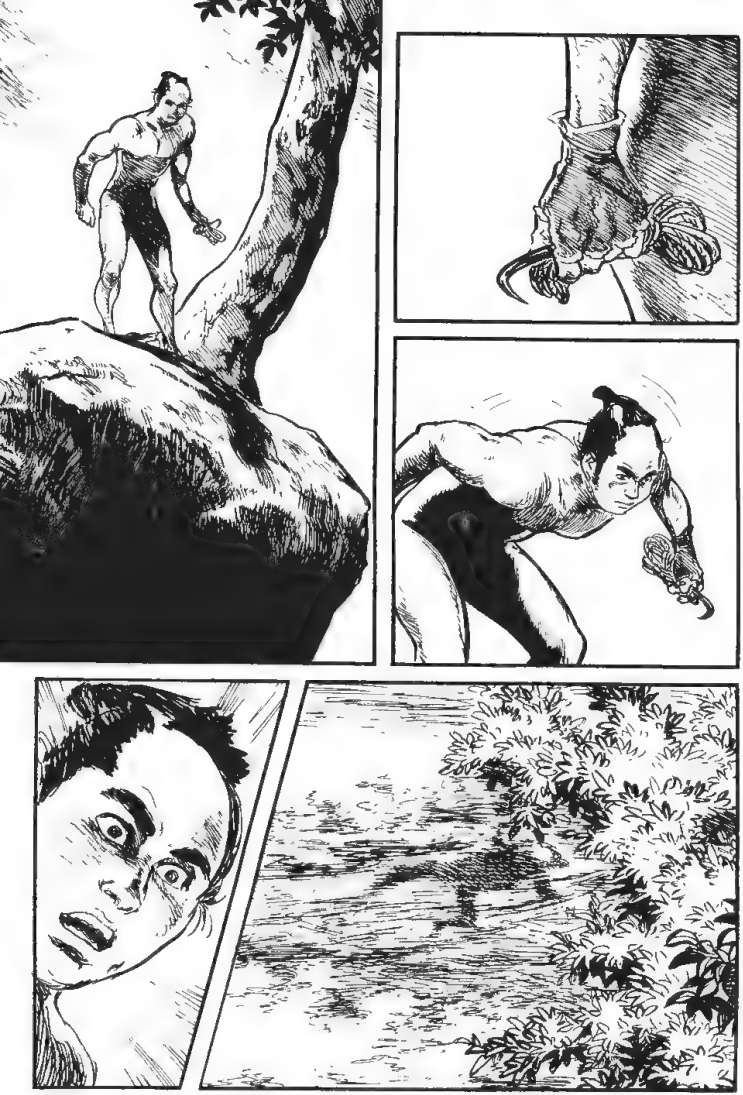
the twenty-sixth

Shinko The Kappa

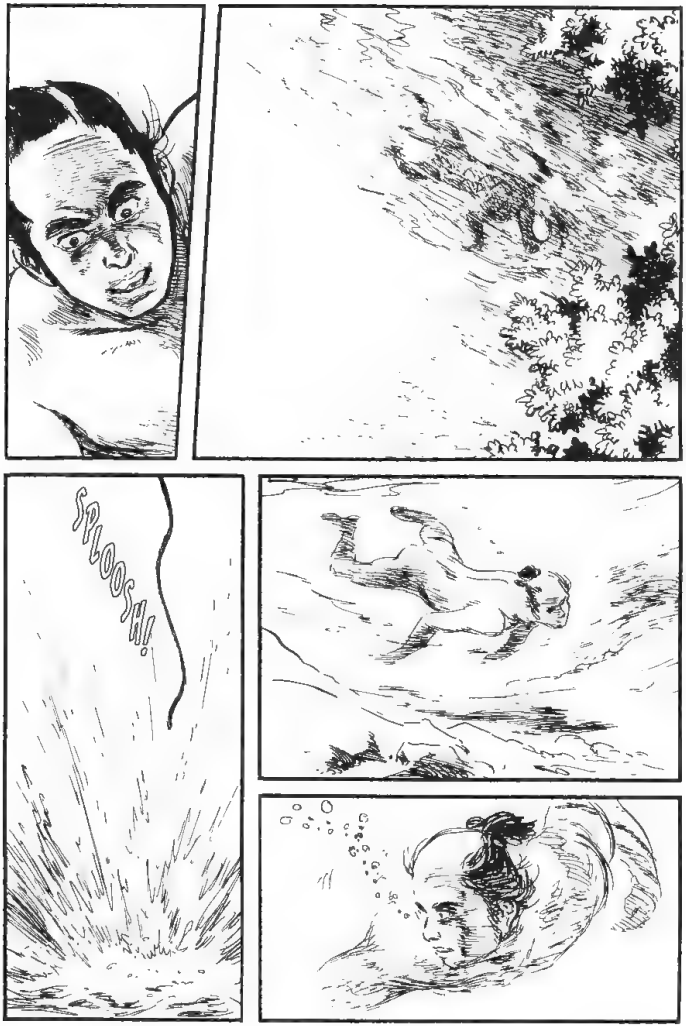


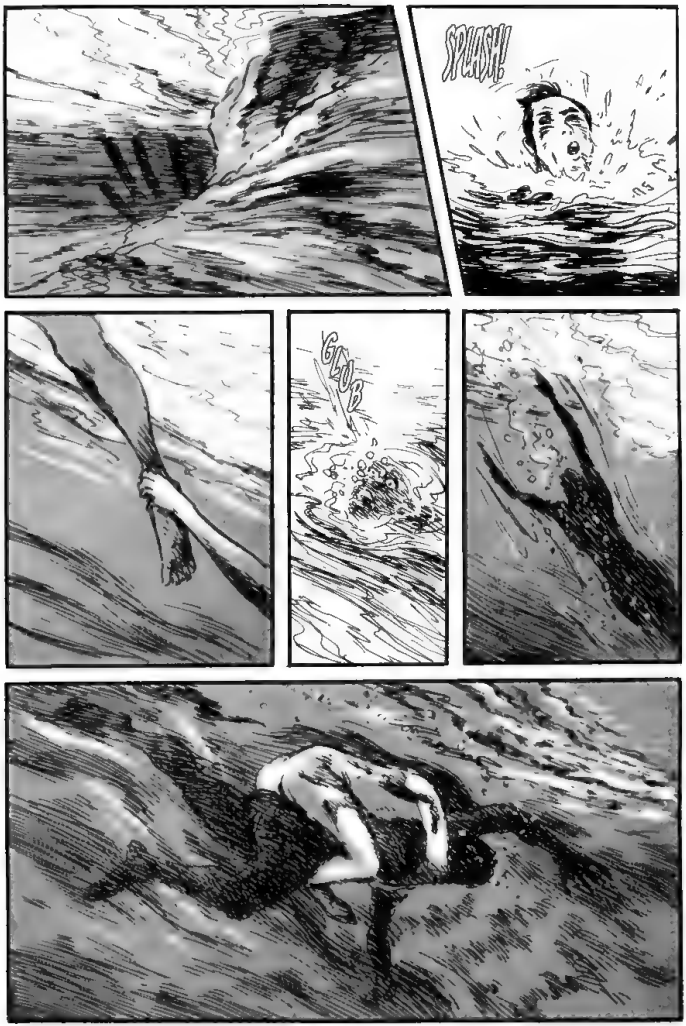


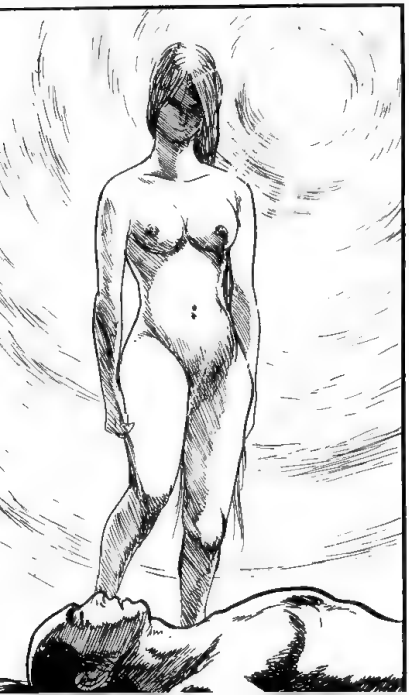




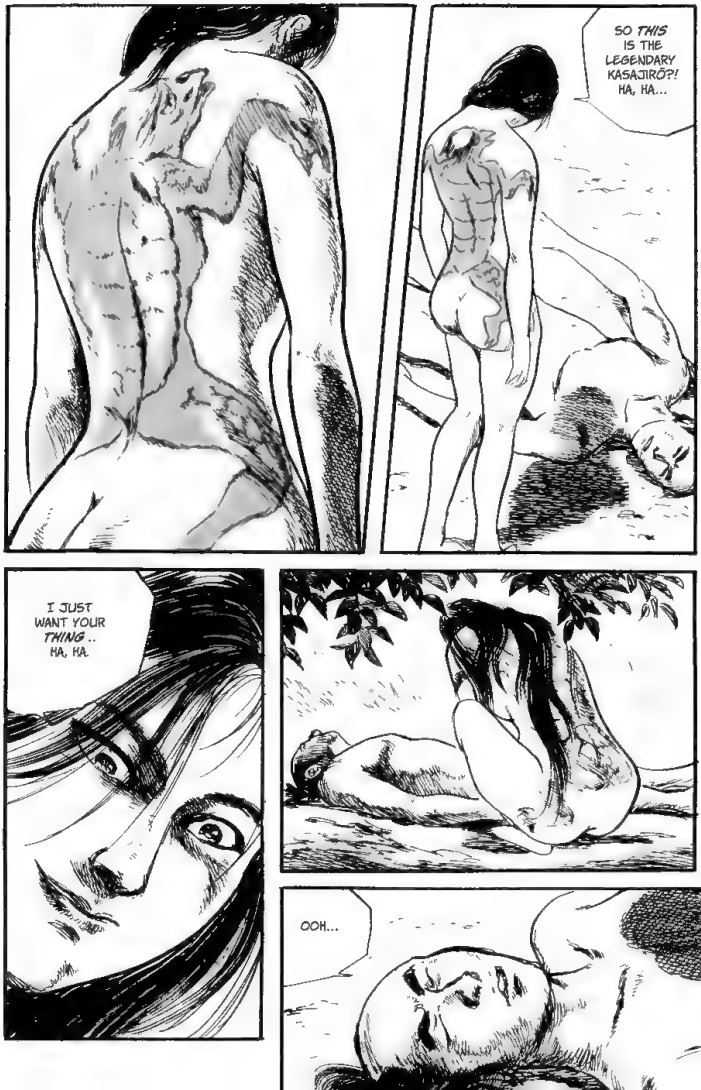
WAHOO!
WHOOSH!
THUNK!


SPLOOSH!


SPLASH!
GLUB



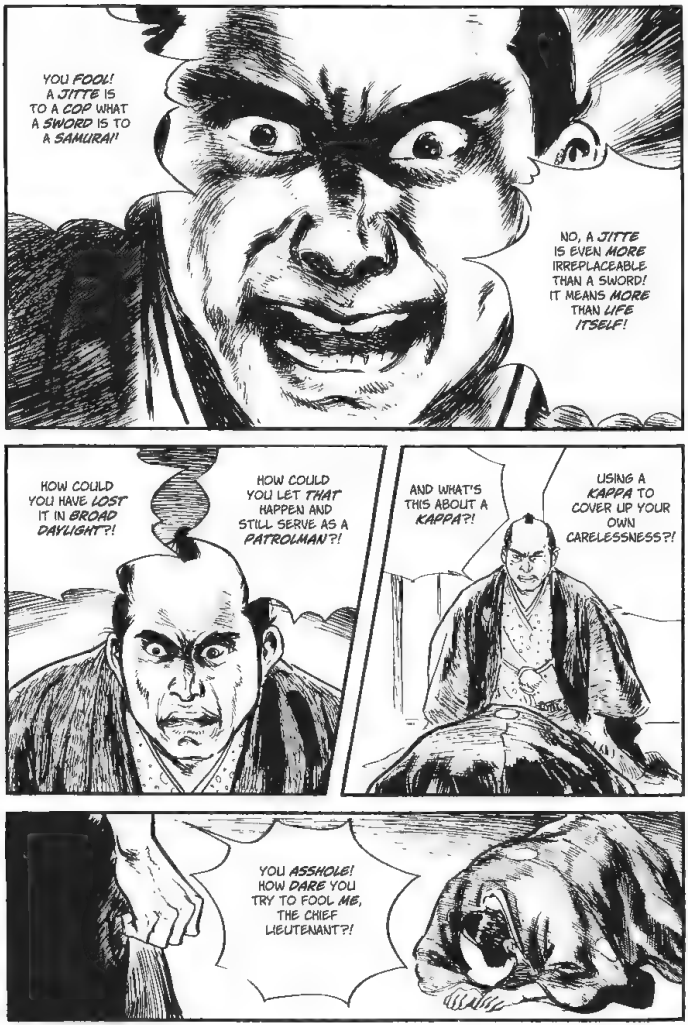
HA, HA... THIS WAS CHILD'S PLAY!


SO *THIS* IS THE LEGENDARY KASAJIRŌ?! HA, HA...
I JUST WANT YOUR *THING*.. HA, HA.
OOH...

AND THIS IS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO HAVE IT TOWER INTO HEAVEN... INTO ME.
AAAH! AAAH!
AHH!
OOH...

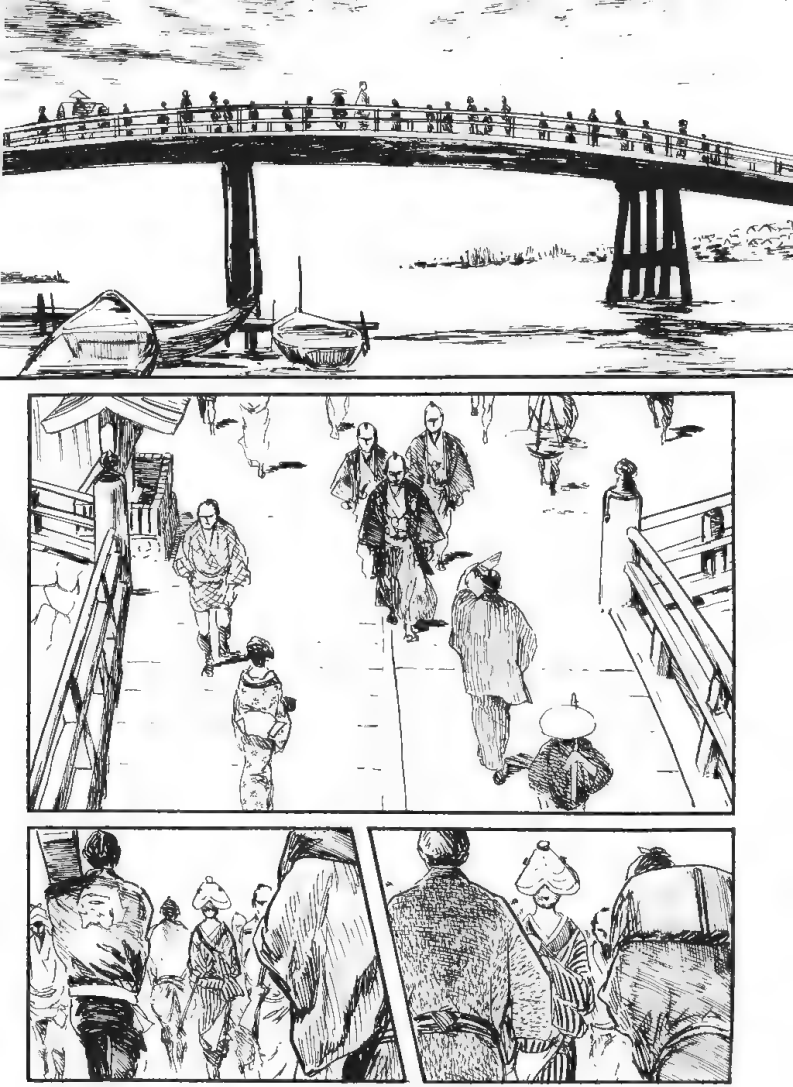
SPLOOSH

HUH?!
M-MY JITTE...


YOU FOOL! A JITTE IS TO A COP WHAT A SWORD IS TO A SAMURAI!
NO, A JITTE IS EVEN MORE IRREPLACEABLE THAN A SWORD! IT MEANS MORE THAN LIFE ITSELF!
HOW COULD YOU HAVE LOST IT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT?!
HOW COULD YOU LET THAT HAPPEN AND STILL SERVE AS A PATROLMAN?!
AND WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A KAPPA?!
USING A KAPPA TO COVER UP YOUR OWN CARELESSNESS?!
YOU ASSHOLE! HOW DARE YOU TRY TO FOOL ME, THE CHIEF LIEUTENANT?!

I...I DIDN'T SAY IT WAS A KAPPA...SH-SHE WAS LIKE A KAPPA...
SAME THING!
Y-YES SIR... THERE'S NO EXCUSE... I'M SORRY...
ALL RIGHT, KASAJIRŌ, I'M GIVING YOU THREE DAYS TO FIND YOUR "STOLEN" JITTE!
IF YOU DON'T FIND IT, YOU'LL HAVE TO RESIGN! AND IF YOU WON'T DO THAT, YOU'LL HAVE TO GO TO KŌFU.
OHHH...

LIEUTENANTS WORE THEIR JITTE ALONGSIDE THEIR SWORDS.
CONSTABLES WORE THEIR JITTE ON THEIR BACK BELTS SO THEY COULDN'T BE SEEN FROM THE FRONT.



WHOOSH!
SWISH!

UNH!
FSHAH!

SH-SHE REALLY WAS... A KAPPA...

SHHH

POPPOP!
BOOM!

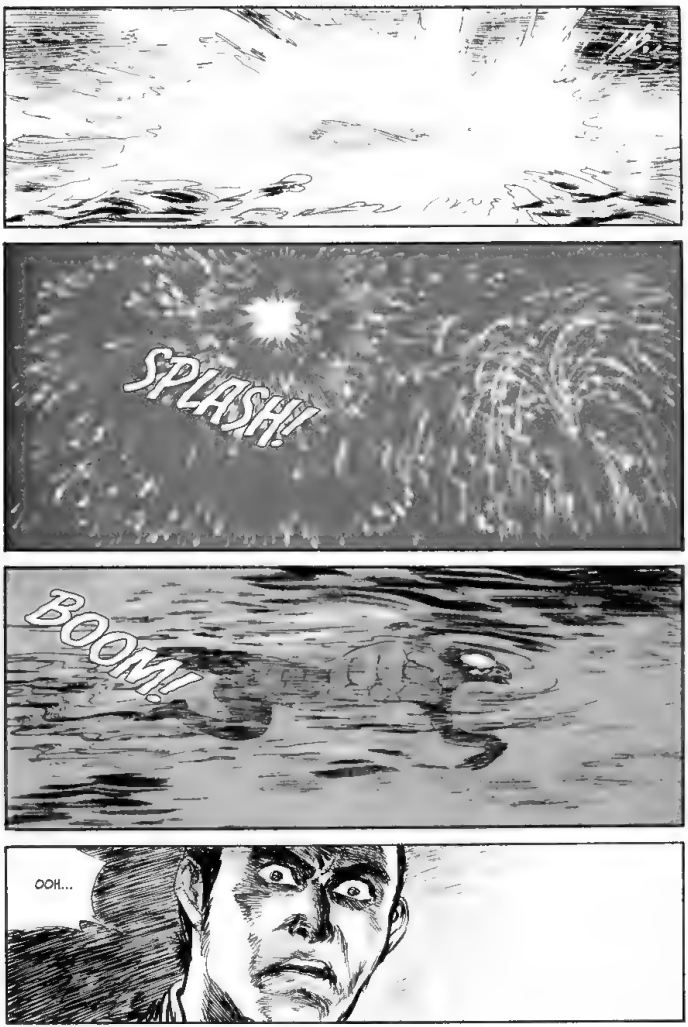
BOOM!
WOWWW!
TAMAYAAA!
KAGIYAA!
BOOM
POP POP

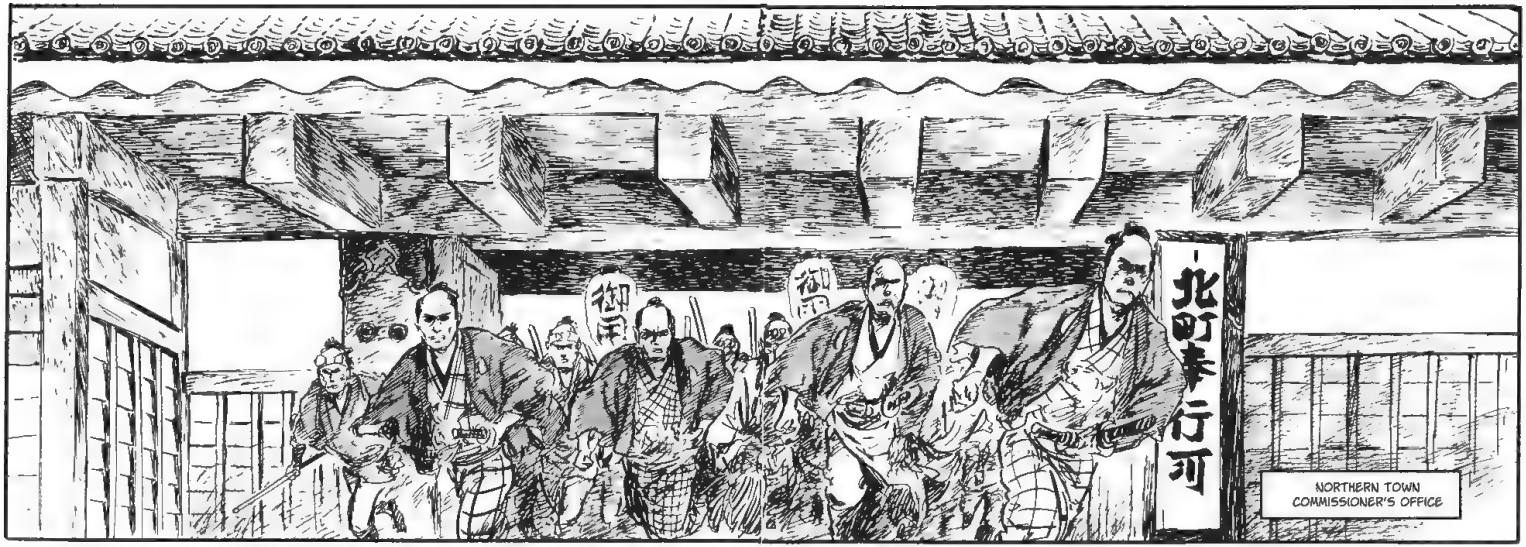
WHOA!

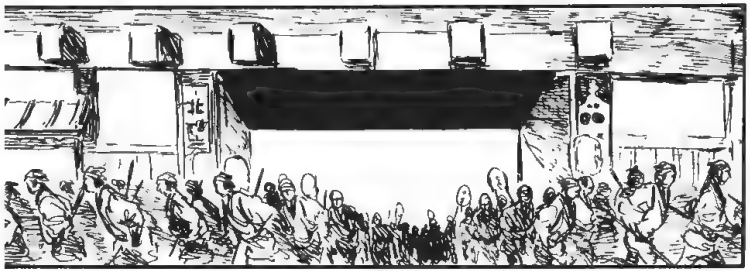
EEEK!
GASP!
UGH!
WHO ARE YOU?! YOU'RE IN THE PRESENCE OF NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER INOUE!
HA HA HA...

DAMN YOU!
WHOCK!
UNGH!
TAP
OOK...

MAY I HAVE YOUR SWORD, SIR? HA, HA, HA...
BOOM!

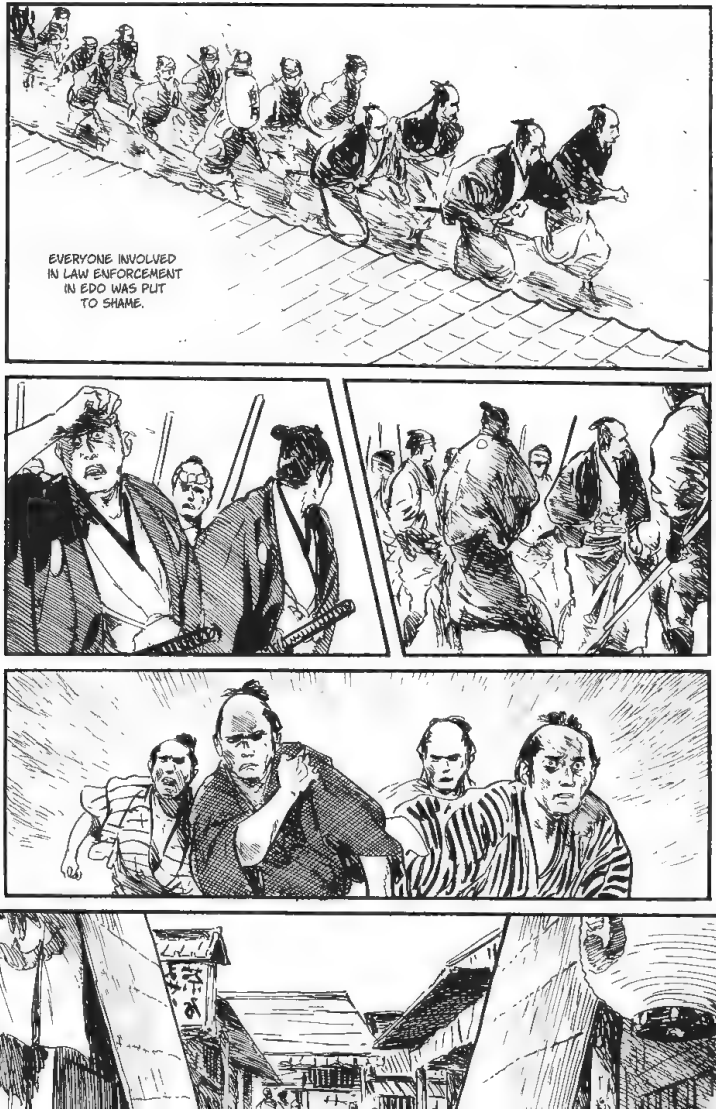

SPLASH!
BOOM!
OOH...





THE WOMAN WITH A *KAPPA* TATTOO CONTINUED TO WREAK HAVOC. THE NUMBER OF LIEUTENANTS AND CONSTABLES WHO HAD LOST THEIR *JITTE* HAD ALREADY RISEN TO *SEVENTEEN*.

SIX HAD LOST THEIR *SWORDS*, INCLUDING THE NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER, ANTI-ARSON AND THEFT OFFICERS, AND THE PRISON COMMISSIONER.


EVERYONE INVOLVED IN LAW ENFORCEMENT IN EDO WAS PUT TO SHAME.

EEEK!
AIEEE!
ON THIS DAY, THE NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, WITH THE AID OF THE ANTI-ARSON AND THEFT DIVISION, SENT OUT ALL ITS MEN TO HUNT DOWN THE WOMAN WITH THE KAPPA TATTOO.
EEEK!

HOWEVER, THEIR PURPOSE WAS NOT MADE PUBLIC, AND THAT MADE THEIR SEARCH VERY DIFFICULT.
御用
小林

THAT'S WHY I'M ASKIN', WHAT?! WHAT THE HELL'S SUPPOSED TO BE ON OUR BACKS?!
SHUT UP! WE'RE LOOKING FOR A WOMAN WITH A KAPPA TATTOO!
WHAT DID THAT WOMAN DO?
SHUT UP! IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU!
SO WHY SHOULD WE HELP YOU?!
WHAT ?!

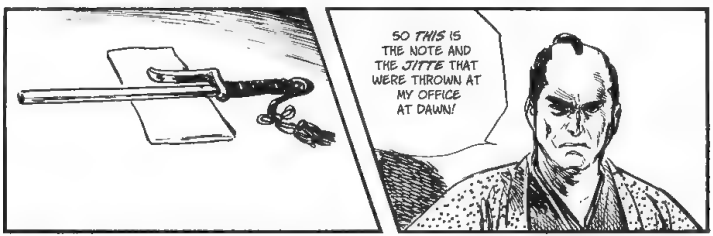
THESE ARE ALL OF OUR FEMALE GUESTS...
HMMM...
BY THE WAY, SIR, JUST WHAT DID THATWOMAN WITH THE KAPPA TATTOO DO?
W-WELL...
I'VE TAKEN ENOUGH OF YOUR TIME.
WHAT IN THE WORLD WAS THAT ABOUT?

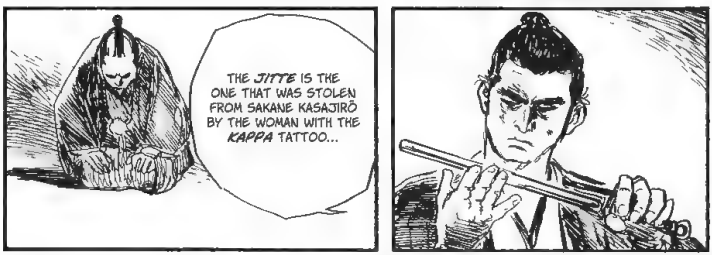
THE TATTOOED WOMAN COMPLETELY SLIPPED THROUGH THE DRAGNET WITHOUT A TRACE.
EEEK!
AAAH!
A TOTAL OF OVER A THOUSAND SEARCHES OF WOMEN DURING THE NEXT THREE DAYS WERE IN VAIN.
EEEK!
GASP!
EEEK!

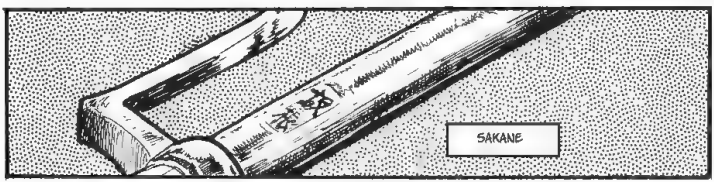
WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' ?!
WHAT'D THAT WOMAN DO?!
DID SHE STEAL?! KILL?!
WHY WAS THAT WOMAN ONLY TARGETING POLICEMEN?

IT'S GETTING LATE, ISN'T IT? THE TIME'S ALREADY PASSED...
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WITNESS?
HE'S STILL NOT HERE YET.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
I DUNNO! MAYBE SOMETHING HAPPENED ALONG THE WAY...

THE GUY WHO'S SUPPOSED TO BE EXECUTED TODAY, YAHEIJI OF DEJIMA, IS THE BOSS OF A SMUGGLING RING!
HE'S A MAJOR FIGURE IN THE UNDERWORLD! IF WE CAN'T EXECUTE HIM ON TIME, THIS WILL SET A BAD EXAMPLE!
YAMADA-SAMA'S BEEN WAITING FOR THE PAST HOUR.
WHAT'S WRONG?
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
YAMADA-SAMA! THIS IS AN EMERGENCY! THE TOWN COMMISSIONER AND CHIEF LIEUTENANT MURAKAMI-SAMA HAVE ARRIVED AT ISHIDE-SAMA'S RESIDENCE. THEY WOULD LIKE YOU TO COME...


SO *THIS* IS THE NOTE AND THE *JITTE* THAT WERE THROWN AT MY OFFICE AT DAWN!


THE *JITTE* IS THE ONE THAT WAS STOLEN FROM SAKANE KASAJIRŌ BY THE WOMAN WITH THE *KAPPA* TATTOO...

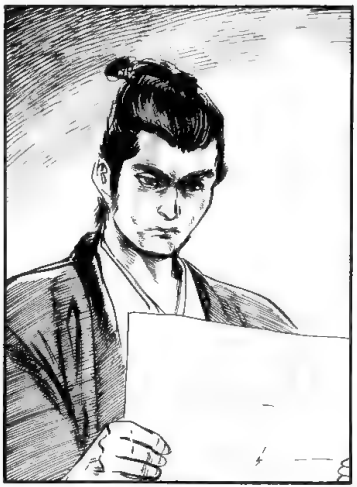

SAKANE

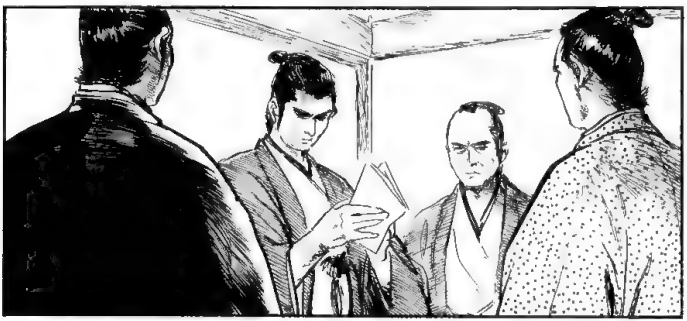
THE NOTE DEMANDS THAT WE *FREE* YAHEIJI OF DEJIMA, THE MAN TO BE EXECUTED TODAY.
IT SAYS THAT IF WE *DON'T* FREE HIM, THEN ALL OF OUR *JITTE* AND SWORDS--ALL WORTH AS MUCH AS OUR *LIVES*--WILL BE USED FOR *MURDER*--AND WILL BE LEFT AT THE CRIME SCENE.

THAT INCLUDES *MY* SWORD, *MURAKAMI'S* SWORD...
...AND *ISHIDE'S WAKIZASHI*.

NOW THAT WOMAN'S INTENTIONS ARE *CLEAR*... IF WE EXECUTE HIM...

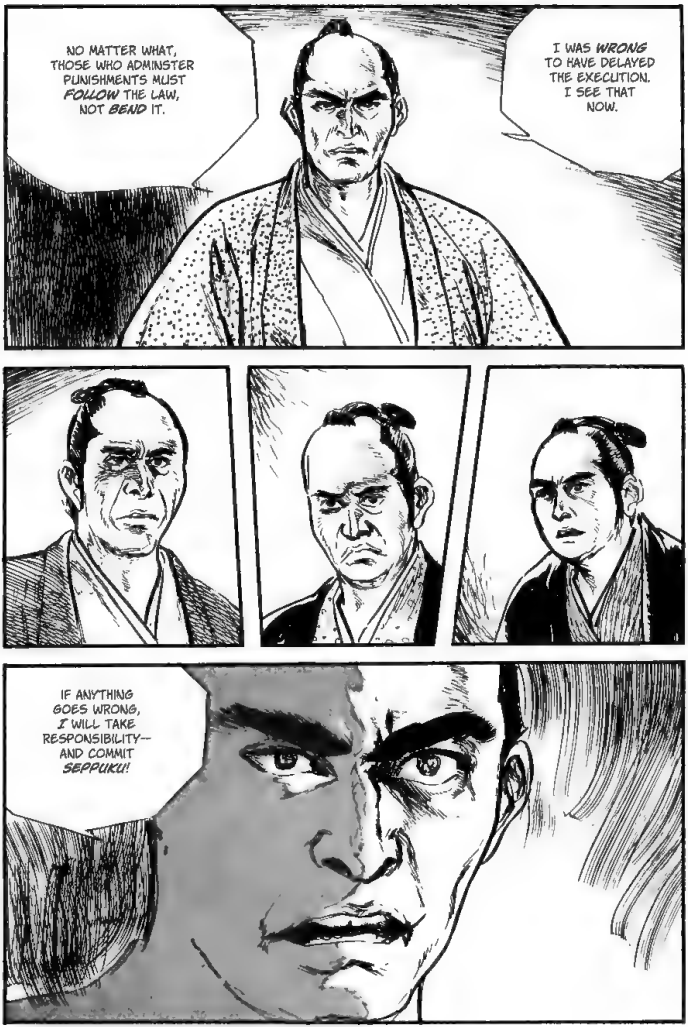
HMMM!





SINCE WE ARE *LATE*, I REQUEST A *QUICK* EXECUTION-- *WITHOUT* A WITNESS!

YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO DELAY THIS ANY FURTHER, WOULD YOU?
B-BUT...
WHY HESITATE ANY LONGER? FURTHER DELAYS WILL ONLY SET AN EVEN *WORSE* PRECEDENT.
IF WE ALLOW HER TO GET AWAY WITH THIS *NOW*, THEN OTHERS WILL TRY TO SAVE *THEIR* FRIENDS ON DEATH ROW *LATER* USING SIMILAR TACTICS...
AND THAT WOULD *NOT* PRESERVE THE AUTHORITY OF THE LAW!
NOW I UNDERSTAND. THAT IS *INDEED* CORRECT.


NO MATTER WHAT, THOSE WHO ADMINSTER PUNISHMENTS MUST *FOLLOW* THE LAW, NOT *BEND* IT.
I WAS *WRONG* TO HAVE DELAYED THE EXECUTION. I SEE THAT NOW.
IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG, *I* WILL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY— AND COMMIT *SEPPUKU!*

DO YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS?
NOPE.

DON'T YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TO THE PERSON WHO WROTE THIS?
YOU WON'T TELL HER WHAT I SAID. YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE SHE IS.
OR WERE YOU GOING TO MAKE ME TELL YOU BEFORE YOU KILLED ME?
ONLY THOSE ABOUT TO BE EXECUTED KNOW HOW IT FEELS.
IT'S UP TO YOU IF YOU WANT TO TELL HER OR NOT...
BUT IF YOU DON'T TELL HER, SHE'LL SOON KNOW HOW IT FEELS-- FIRSTHAND.

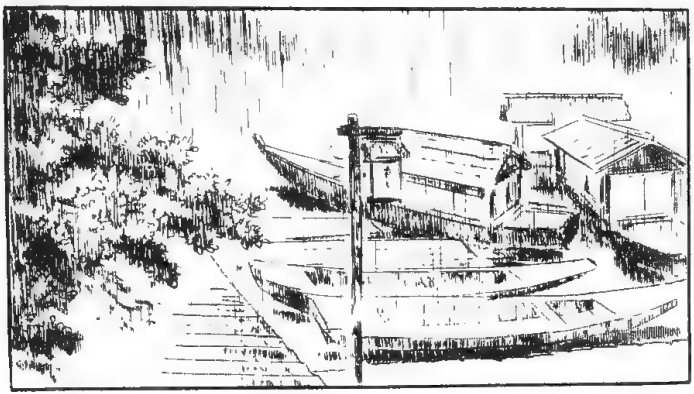
DO YOU WANT *HER* TO BE WHERE *YOU* ARE RIGHT NOW? IT'S UP TO YOU.
OK...

BZHHH!
I'LL GIVE HER A LOCK OF YOUR HAIR.
IF YOU TELL US WHERE SHE IS, THE GOVERNMENT WILL SHOW HER MERCY!

M-MY DAUGHTER... IS AT THE BOAT-KEEPER'S... KIRAKU IN FUKAGAWA...
PLEASE BE MERCIFUL TO HER!
PLEASE REDUCE HER CHARGES!
BZAHH!

YAMADA-*SAMA*, I'LL GO AND DELIVER HIS TOPKNOT
IT'D BE BEST TO GO *ALONE*.
YES, SIR.
PPP!
WE'VE STILL GOT TIME.

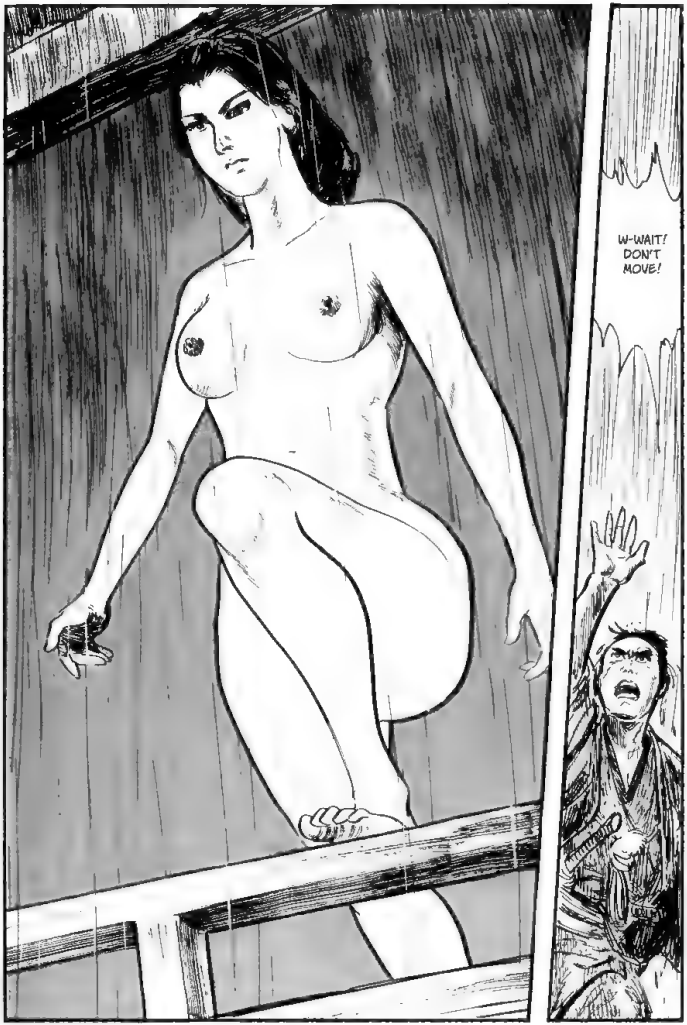
WE CAN STILL PREVENT HER FROM SITTING THERE.
YES, SIR.
SHHHH



喜樂
KIRAKU

SPLISH
SPLISH
SPLISH
SPLISH
SPLISH
SPLISH
SPLASH!

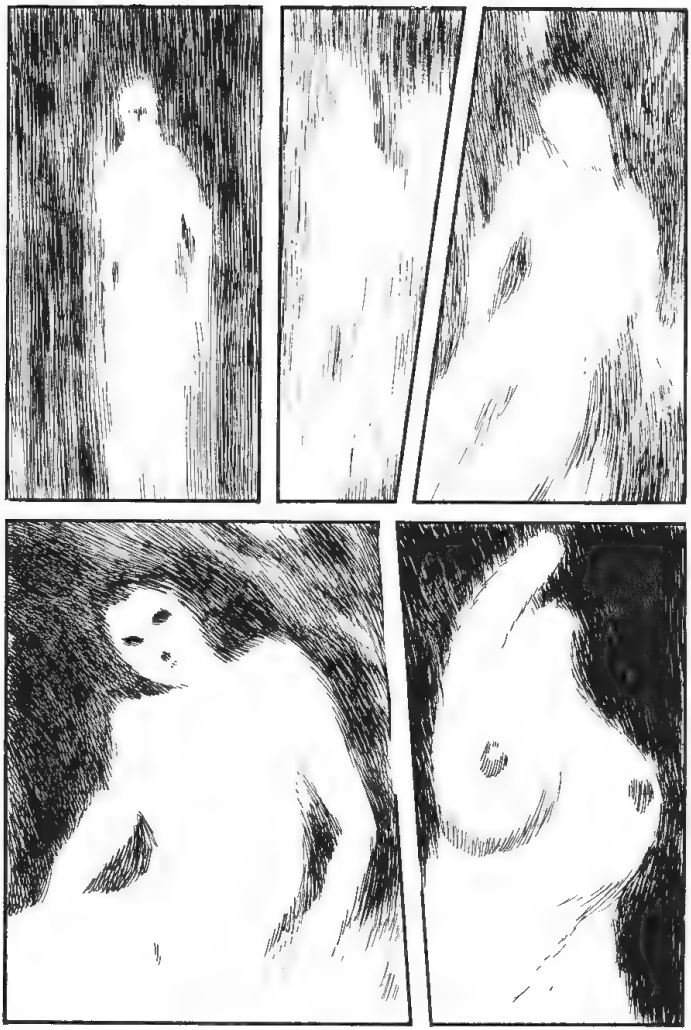
YES, I'M SHINKO THE KAPPA!
IT'S YOU, ISN'T IT?
SHINKO THE KAPPA...
YAHEIJI OF DEJIMA WAS JUST EXECUTED!
I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU... KASAJIRÔ!


W-WAIT! DON'T MOVE!

HE DID IT BECAUSE HE WANTED US TO REDUCE THE CHARGES AGAINST YOU!
YAHEIJI TOLD ME WHERE YOU LIVED!
D-DAD...

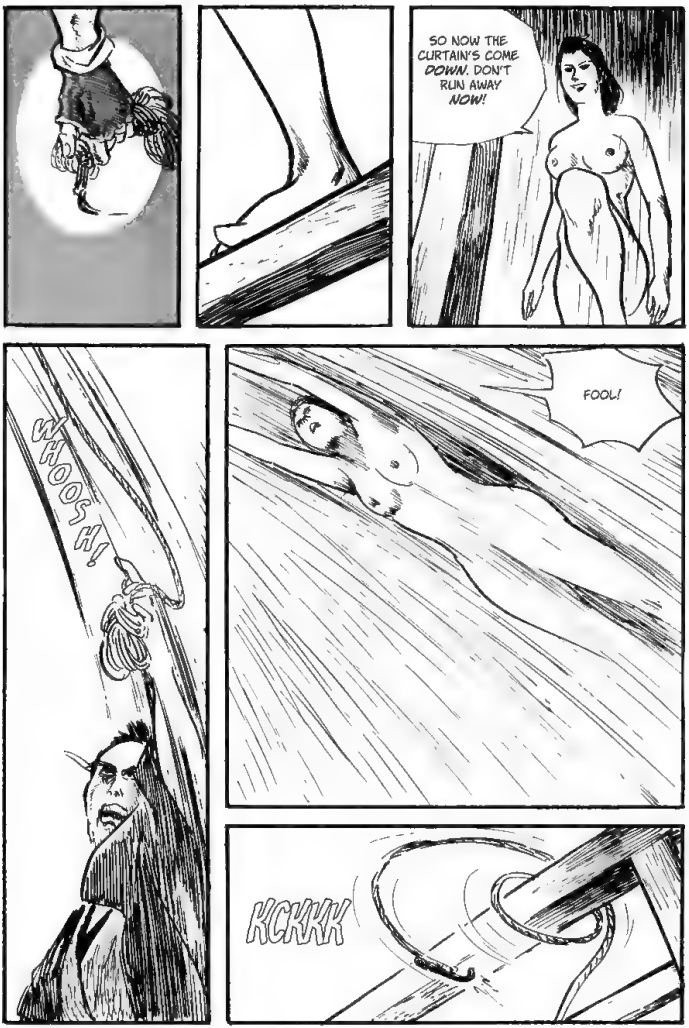
IT'S YOUR FATHER'S HAIR!
I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU!
D-DON'T MOVE, SHINKO!
HE GAVE IT TO YOU BECAUSE HE DIDN'T WANT YOU TO COMMIT ANY MORE CRIMES!

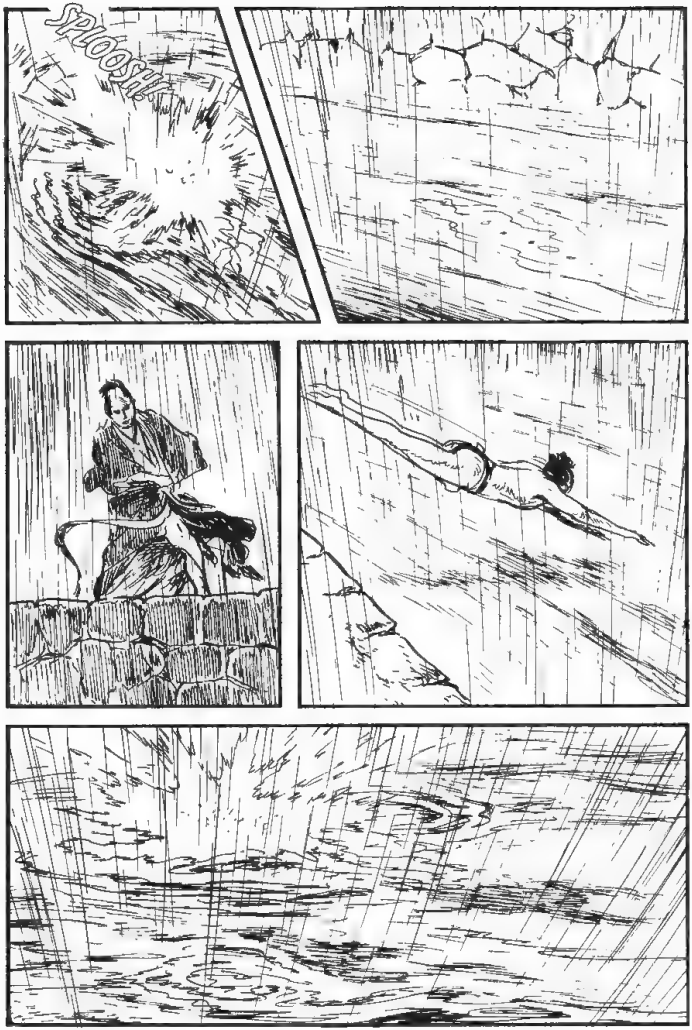
TAKE IT--
AND GIVE
YOURSELF
UP!
YOU CAN'T
GIVE UP
YOUR *FEELINGS*,
CAN YOU?
W-WHAT...?
DON'T SAY
YOU DON'T
REMEMBER, EVEN
IF YOU *WERE*
UNCONSCIOUS!
HA, HA!



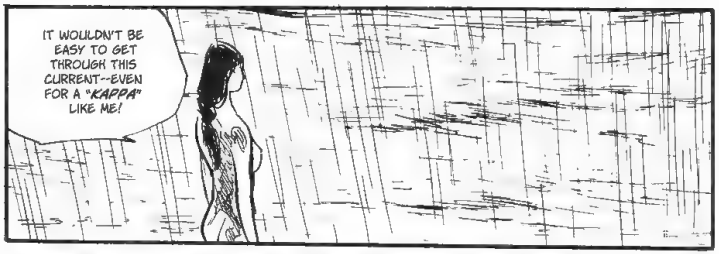
HA, HA! NOW DO YOU REMEMBER?
YOU HELD ME SO TIGHT! HA, HA!
WHO WAS HOLDING WHOM? WHO CARES! HA, HA!

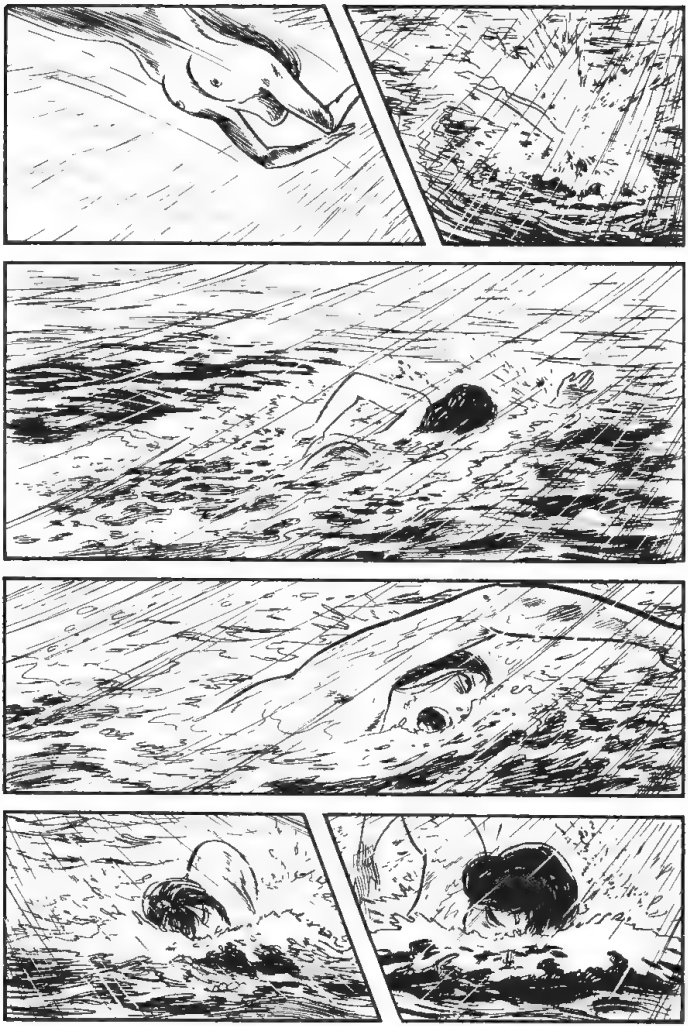
I JUST KNEW THAT YOU'D BE THE ONE WHO'D COME TO TAKE ME IN!
THAT'S WHY I DID IT WITH YOU BACK THERE-- SO THAT YOU'D SUFFER! I HAD IT ALL PLANNED OUT. HA, HA.
OH...
DON'T MOVE. IF YOU TAKE ME IN, THIS WILL ALL BE REVEALED IN COURT.
AFTER FAILING TIME AND TIME AGAIN, YOU'LL LOSE YOUR POST!
AND BECAUSE OF DAD'S PROMISE, I PROMISE THAT I WON'T DO ANYTHING BAD ANYMORE!
I'LL RETURN THE SWORDS AND JITTE THAT I STOLE.


SO NOW THE CURTAIN'S COME *DOWN*. DON'T RUN AWAY *NOW*!
FOOL!
WHOOSH!
KCKKK


SPLOOSH

WHAT AN IDIOT... DOING THE SAME THING TWICE...


IT WOULDN'T BE EASY TO GET THROUGH THIS CURRENT--EVEN FOR A "KAPPA" LIKE ME!



SPLASH!

HEH

FFF
FFF

OH...

HA, HA! YOU'RE CONSCIOUS AGAIN! HA, HA! JUST LOOK AT YOU, KASAJIRŌ!
THE PURSUER HAS BEEN SAVED BY THE PURSUED! HA, HA!
HA HA HA HA!
HA HA!
IF I HADN'T SAVED YOU, YOU'D BE FISH FOOD BY NOW!
AS A BONUS, I EVEN GAVE YOU THE BREATH OF LIFE! DON'T I DESERVE SOME THANKS? HA, HA!
I HOPE YOU'VE LEARNED FROM THIS NEVER TO GO CHASING AFTER ME AGAIN!
THPPPT!

AAAH!
YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!
D-DAMN YOU!
YOU... UNGRATE-FUL...!

YOU... ANIMAL!
RRRRR!
OW!
SPSH!
UNGH!

AHHH!

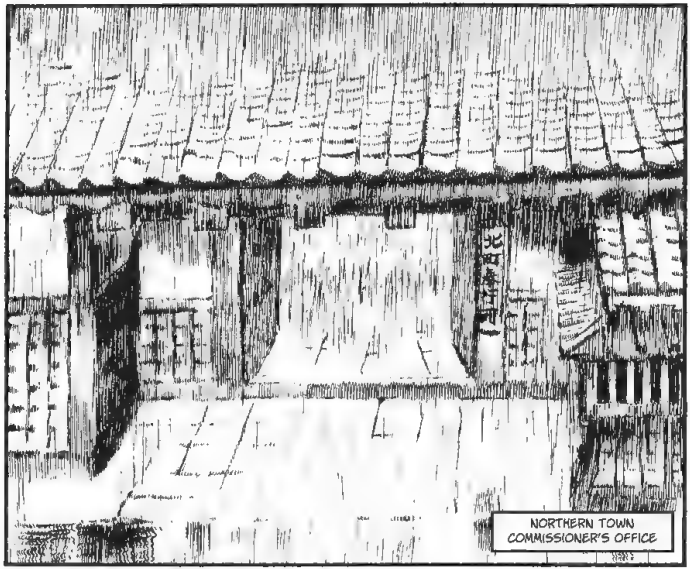
AHHH!
Y-YOU'RE...
S-SO...
GOOD...

AHHH!
D-DAMN YOU...
YOU'RE UNDER *ARREST*!
Y-YOU'RE AN *ANIMAL*!
A-AND *THEN*...
YOU *TIE* ME UP WITH YOUR *LOINCLOTH*!
FIRST YOU *FUCK* ME...

YOU UNGRATEFUL...
IF YOU'RE GONNA HAND ME OVER, JUST DO IT ALREADY!
EVEN HOW YOU SCREWED ME! SO DO WHATEVER YOU WANNA DO!
...DOG!
I'LL TELL 'EM EVERYTHING!
GET UP!

the twenty-seventh

A Couple of Umbrellas

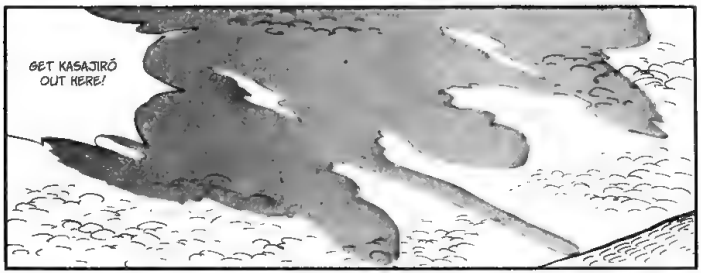

NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

THANK YOU, SIR.
WELL DONE, KASAJIRŌ! GOOD WORK!

THESE ARE THE STOLEN WEAPONS, INCLUDING YOUR SWORD AND MURAKAMI-SAMA'S JITTE.
YAHEIJI'S DAUGHTER, SHINKO THE KAPPA, HAD HID THEM IN THE CEILING OF THE BOAT-KEEPER'S PLACE WHERE SHE HAD BEEN HIDING.
WHEW...
LOOKS LIKE WE MANAGED TO SAVE FACE.
WE CAN ALL SLEEP SOUNDLY TONIGHT.

WHO IS THIS SHINKO THE KAPPA?
WE CAUGHT HER AND WE HAVE HER IN CUSTODY.
I WOULD NOW LIKE TO RECEIVE HER BOND OF IMPRISONMENT.
HMMM...
EVEN SO, WHAT SHOULD SHE BE CHARGED WITH?
WELL...
I-I HAVE A REQUEST TO MAKE.
I-I WOULD LIKE HER TO BE MY WIFE. O-OF COURSE THAT WOULD BE AFTER SHE HAD SERVED HER SENTENCE. C-COULD YOU PLEASE TAKE THAT INTO ACCOUNT?
W-WHAT?!

WHEN I WAS ABOUT TO DIE, SHE SAVED MY LIFE.
SO IS THAT WHY?
I... I FELL FOR HER.
WELL SAID.
I WILL DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO HELP YOU.
Y-YAMADA-SAMA!
HOW ABOUT THIS, COM-MISSIONER?
WHAT IF I ADOPTED HER? THERE SHOULD BE NO PROBLEM WITH THAT.
W-WELL...


GET KASAJIRŌ OUT HERE!

I GOT SOMETHING I WANNA SAY TO HIM!

KASAJIRŌ!
GET HIM OUT HERE!

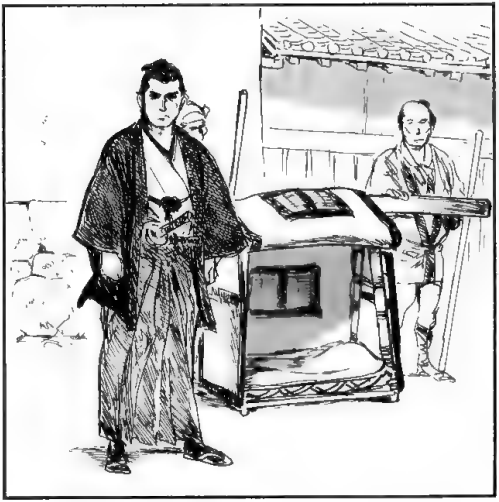
THAT SCUM! HE FUCKED ME AND MADE A FOOL OUT OF ME!
AND HE'S STILL A JITTE MAN! DAMN!

THE COMMISSIONER IS HERE.
YOU MUST BE SHINKO, THE DAUGHTER OF YAHEIJI OF DEJIMA WHO WAS JUST EXECUTED.
HMPH.
YOU'RE SITTING BEFORE THE COMMISSIONER. BEHAVE YOURSELF WHEN YOU ANSWER!
FINE.
YOU DON'T FEAR THE STATE. IF YOU HAVE TRULY DONE SO MANY LAWLESS ACTS, YOU SHOULD BE CHARGED WITH A SERIOUS CRIME.

KEEPING IN MIND THE FACT THAT YOU ACTED OUT OF FILIAL PIETY BY TRYING TO SAVE YOUR FATHER, WE WILL REDUCE YOUR CHARGES AND MERELY EXPEL YOU FROM EDO.
I GOT SOMETHING TO SAY.
THE PATROLMAN WHO ARRESTED ME-- KASAJIRŌ-- HE--
BE QUIET! I'M NOT DONE TALKING, ALL RIGHT?!
ALTHOUGH WE ARE ORDERING YOU TO LEAVE EDO, IF THERE IS A MAN WHO WOULD EXCHANGE VOWS WITH YOU, AND IF YOU BECAME HIS WIFE, THE STATE WOULD BE MERCIFUL AND GIVE YOU SPECIAL TREATMENT.
YOU WOULD BE ALLOWED TO RESIDE IN EDO. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!
WHAT'RE YOU SAYING?! NO MAN WOULD WANT TO MARRY ME!
IF THAT'S THE CASE, LISTEN TO ME! LISTEN!
KASAJIRŌ MADE LOVE TO ME!
THERE'S MORE!

WHEN KASAJIRÓ WAS DROWNING, I RISKED MY *LIFE* TO SAVE HIM!
HE OWES HIS *LIFE* TO *ME*. AND EVEN SO, THAT SCUM WANTS TO MARRY *ME*...
ME...
LISTEN TO ME!
DAMN! HE'S PRETENDING TO *IGNORE* ME!
GET UP!

GTCHK
DAMN!



Y-YOU'RE HEAD-CHOPPER ASA!
PLEASE RIDE WITH US
?!
STARTING TODAY, YOU WILL BE MY ADOPTED DAUGHTER.
W-WHAT?!
AND YOU WILL MARRY SAKANE KASAJIRO.
HUH?!
AND JUST AS THE COMMISSIONER SAID, IF YOU MARRY HIM, THEN YOU'LL BE PERMITTED TO STAY IN EDO

HA, HA. I CAN SEE RIGHT THROUGH YOU GUYS.
YOU'RE GONNA TAKE ME SOMEWHERE AND GET RID OF ME.
I THOUGHT IT WAS STRANGE THAT I'D ONLY BE BANISHED FROM EDO. IT SEEMED TOO LIGHT A PUNISHMENT. THE COMMISSIONER'S IN ON THE PLOT TOO.
IT'D BE TOO MUCH TROUBLE FOR YOU GUYS IF YOU LET ME LIVE...
BECAUSE EVEN IF I ONLY SAID A LITTLE, THAT'D BE ENOUGH TO DISHONOR THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE.
YOU'D HAVE TO GET THE APPROVAL OF THE ELDERS TO HAVE ME EXECUTED, AND TO DO THAT, THEY'D HAVE TO HEAR ABOUT HOW THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE WAS DISHONORED.
HOW ITS MEN LOST THEIR SWORDS AND JITTE!
THAT'S WHY YOU SAID I'D BE BANISHED FROM EDO... WHILE YOU ELIMINATED ME IN SECRET.
YOU HAD IT ALL PLANNED.

I'M NOT LYING. SAKANE KASAJIRŌ REALLY *DOES* WISH TO MARRY YOU.
LIAR! SHUT UP!

H-HOW COULD A *JIKISAN*, A *JITTE* MAN, POSSIBLY WANT TO MARRY SOMEONE OF *UNKNOWN* LINEAGE, A DAUGHTER OF AN *EXECUTED* MAN?!

IF HE MARRIED ME, THEN EVERYONE WOULD GET ALL UPPITY AND ASK HOW A *RAT* COULD GIVE BIRTH TO A *KITTEN!*

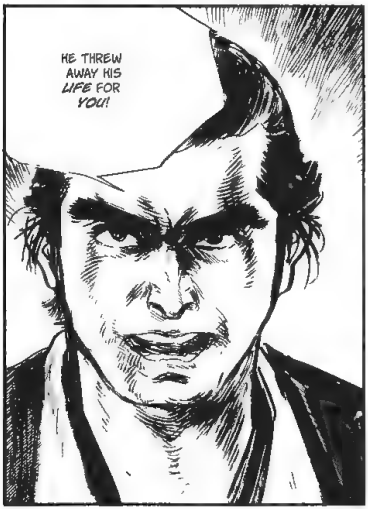
COULD HE MARRY THIS *KAPPA*?!

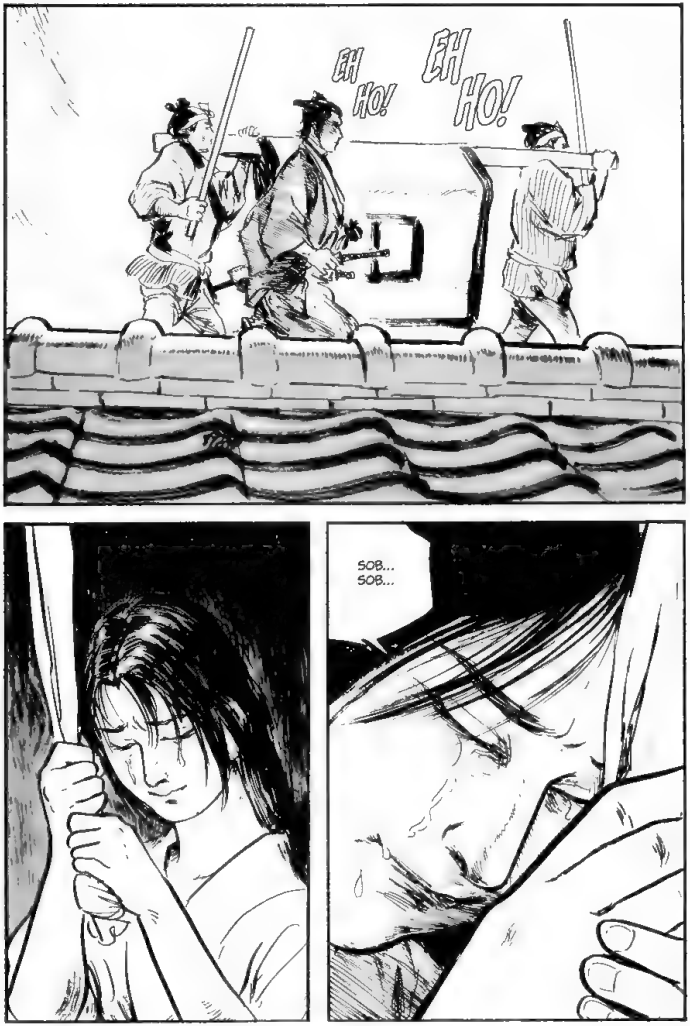
SAKANE SAID HE *FELL* FOR YOU.
THINK ABOUT THE *MEANING* OF THOSE WORDS. TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY, HE'S WILLING TO GIVE UP *EVERYTHING* FOR YOU.
EVERYTHING... INCLUDING HIS POST, OF COURSE... AND HIS STATUS AS A SAMURAI.
WHEN HE TOLD THE COMMISSIONER THAT HE WANTED TO MARRY YOU, HE WAS READY TO GIVE *ALL* OF THAT UP. AND *THAT'S* WHY THE COMMISSIONER GAVE HIM PERMISSION.
BUT IF YOU SAY YOU HATE SAKANE, THEN IT CAN'T BE HELPED...

I THINK YOU'RE CONVINCED.
COME ON, GET IN.
N-NO! WH-WHO...

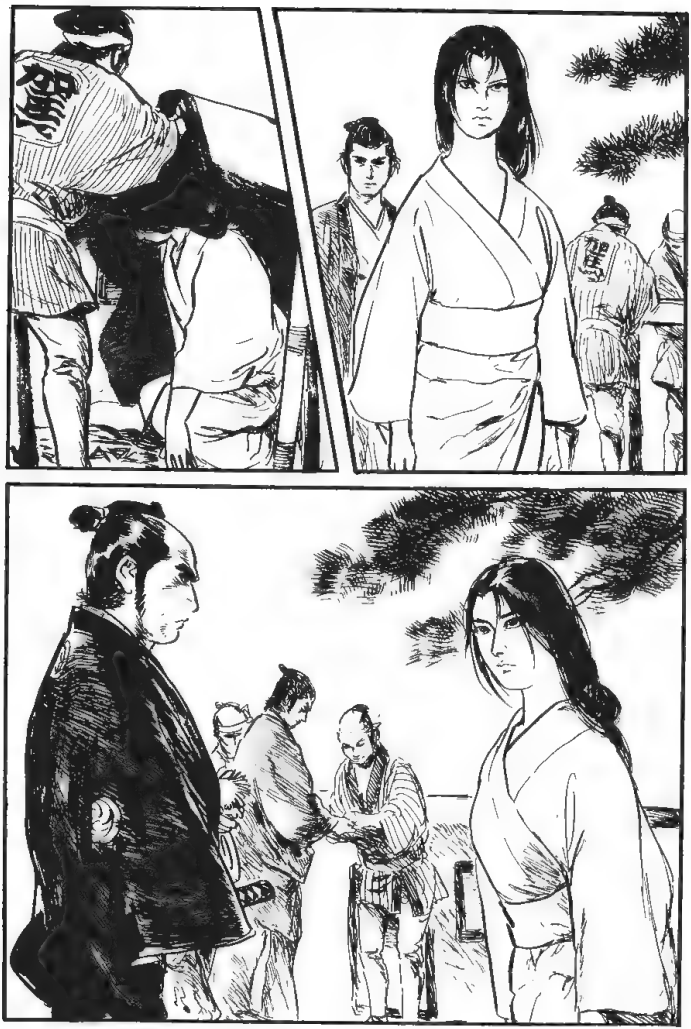
NOOO!
WH-WHO WOULD WANT TO BE WITH A GUY LIKE HIM?!
A-AND... YOU'RE THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER! YOU'RE MY ENEMY!
WHY WOULD I...
...WANT TO BECOME YOUR ADOPTED DAUGHTER?!

WHY DON'T YOU TELL THAT TO SAKANE *IN PERSON*?
HE'S WAITING AT MY HOUSE.


HE THREW AWAY HIS *LIFE* FOR *YOU*!


EH HO!
EH HO!
SOB...
SOB...

YAMADA



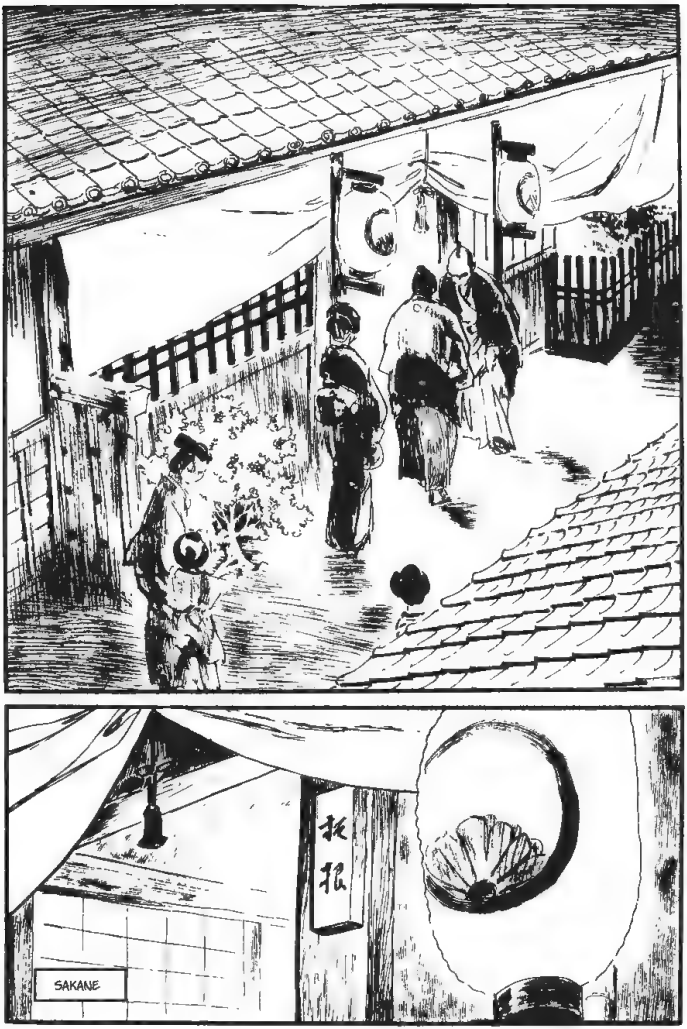
WON'T YOU... BE MY... WIFE?
I REFUSE!
WHY...?
BECAUSE THE WORLD WILL POINT FINGERS AT YOU!
BECAUSE YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO GET AHEAD! BECAUSE OUR MARRIAGE WILL GET IN THE WAY OF YOUR DUTIES! I DON'T WANT YOUR EASY SYMPATHY!

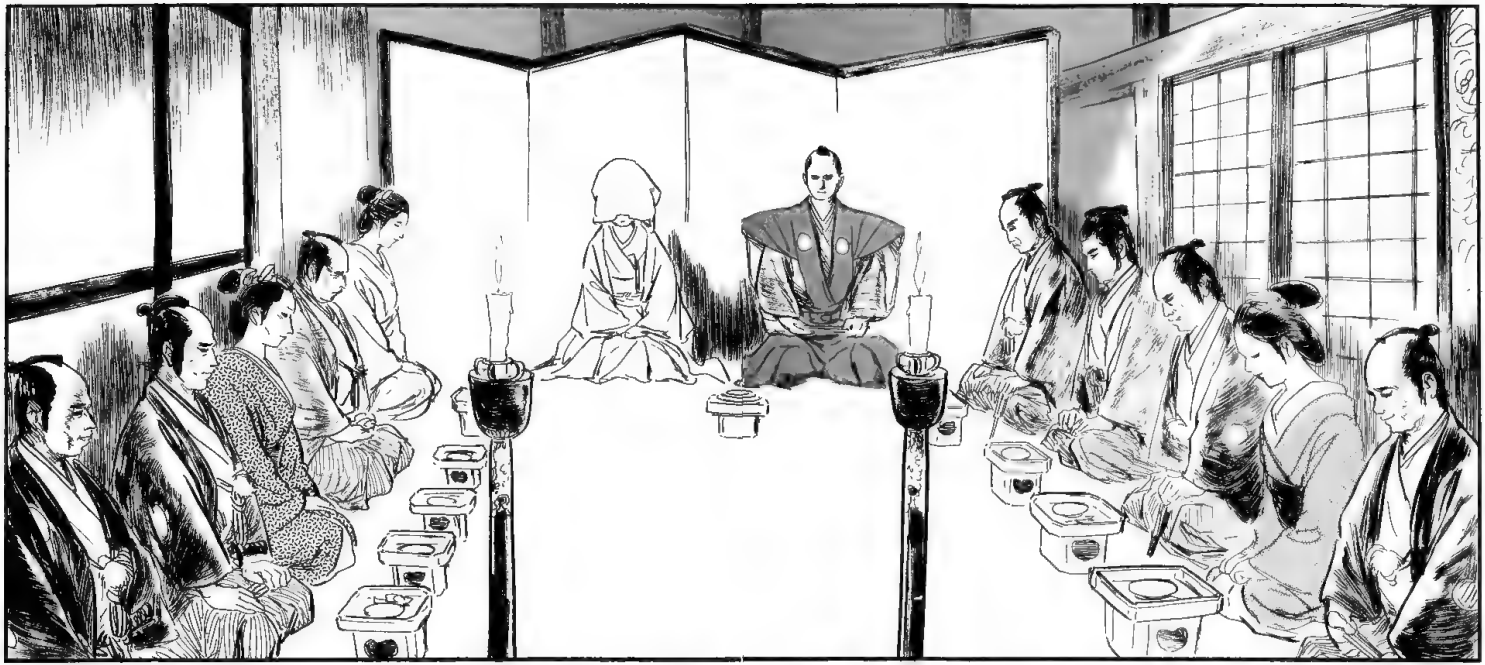
JUST BECAUSE YOU EMBRACED ME DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TO SUPPORT ME FOR THE REST OF YOUR *LIFE*, OF ALL THINGS!
I'M NOT ASKING ABOUT *THAT*!
I'M ASKING YOU HOW *YOU* FEEL!

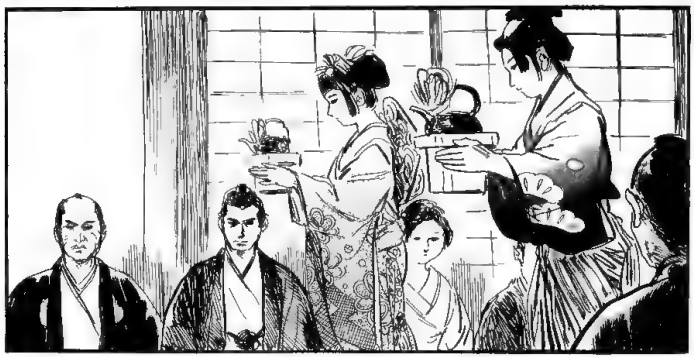
I'M ASKING YOU IF YOU LOVE ME!
IF WE CAN'T BE TOGETHER, TELL ME YOU HATE ME!
ARGH! I TOLD YOU ALREADY! I HATE YOU! YOU MAKE ME SICK!
WHACK!
AHKH!

DO YOU MEAN IT?!
SHINKO!
SHINKO...

AAAH!
OOOH...
OHHH!


SAKANE

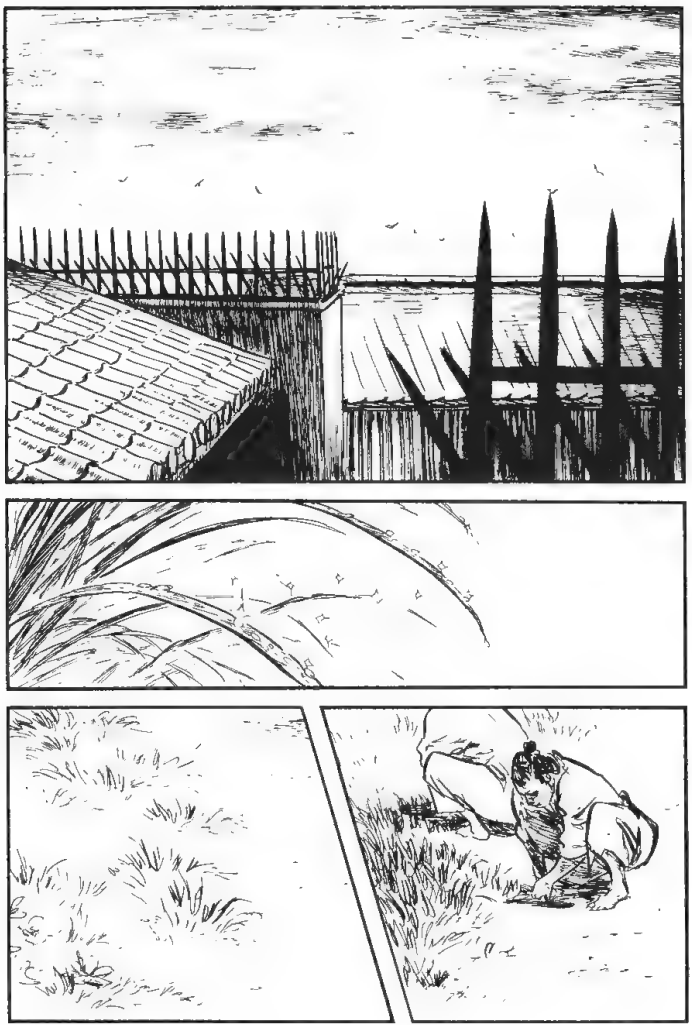


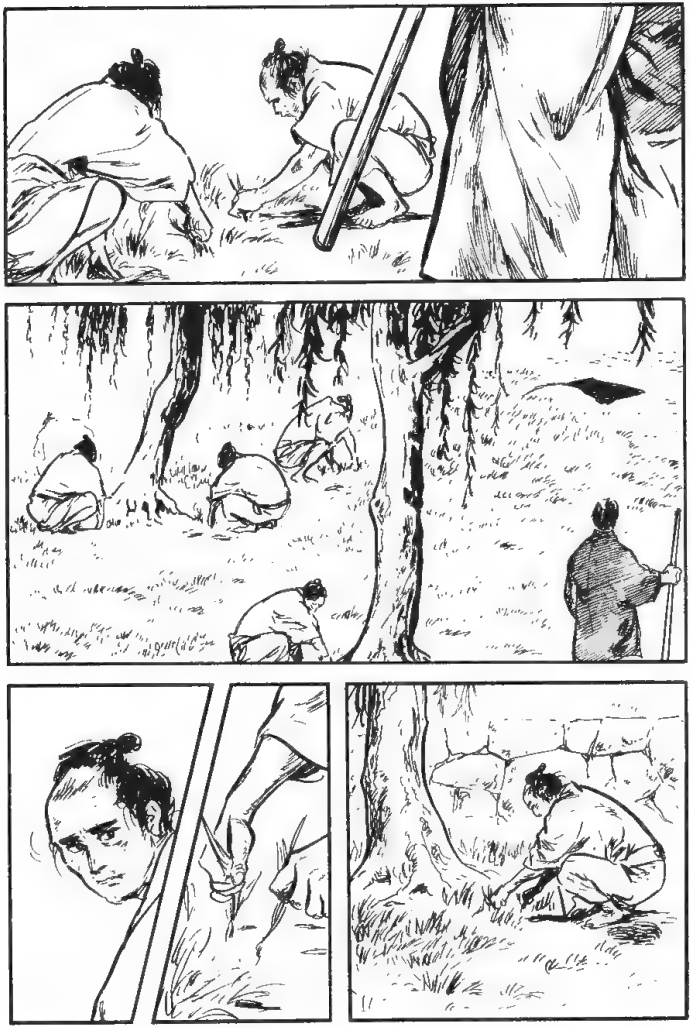


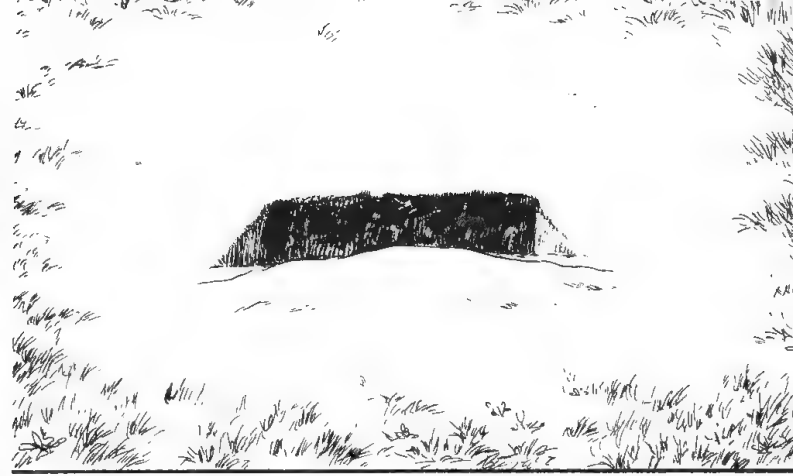
TAKE THE WINE CUP...

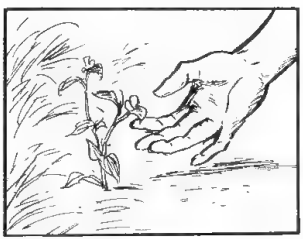
the twenty-eighth

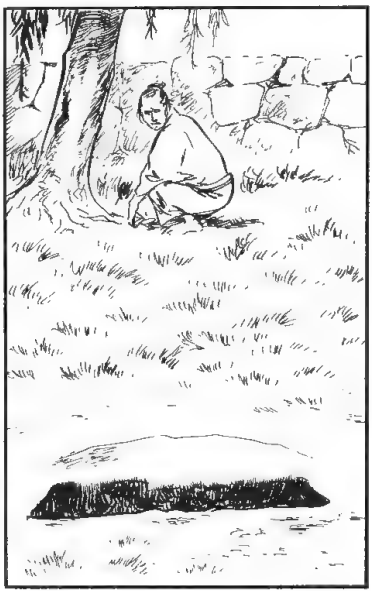
Facing the Dew

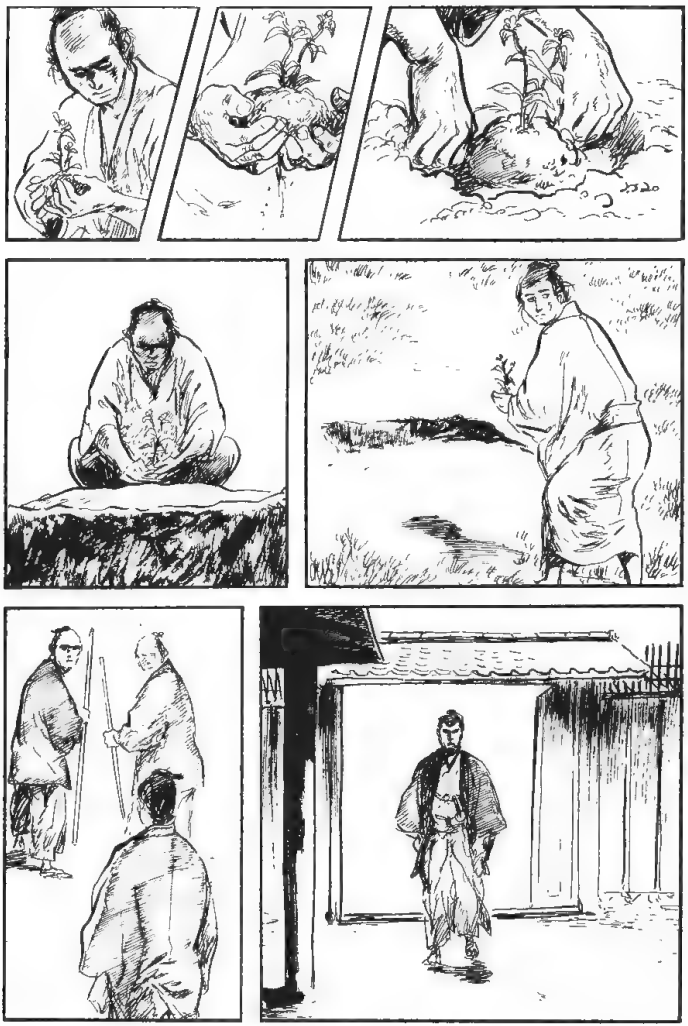


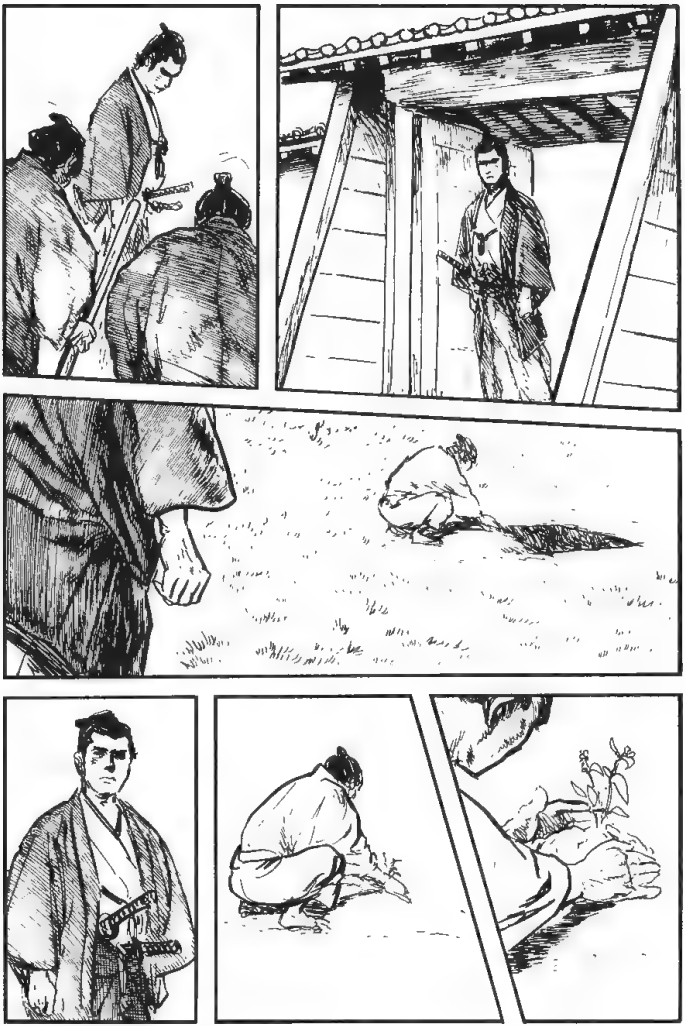


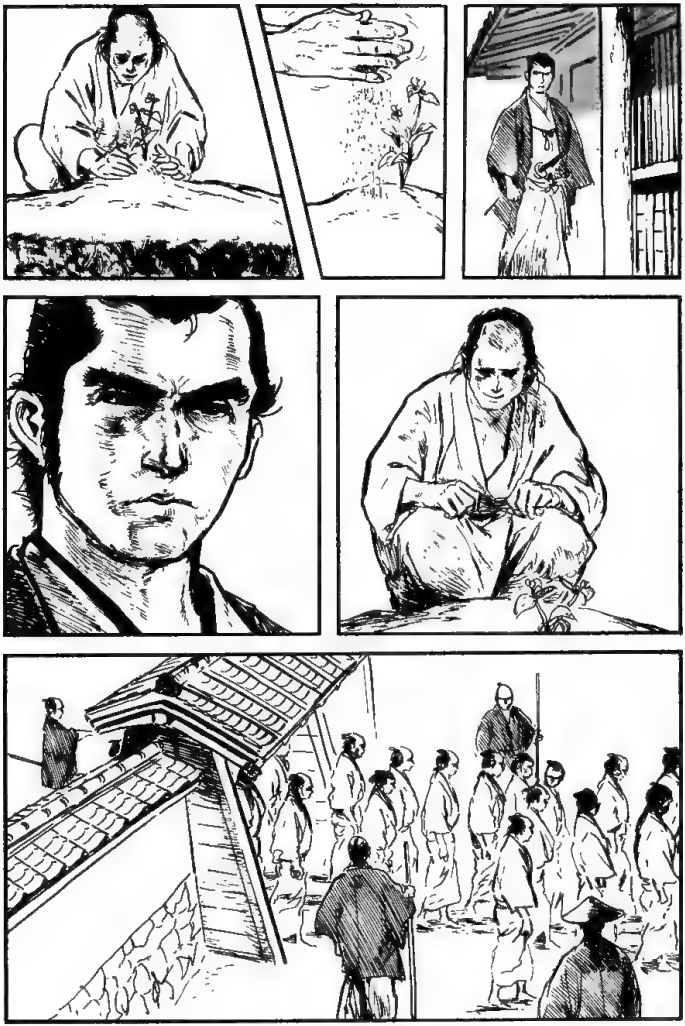


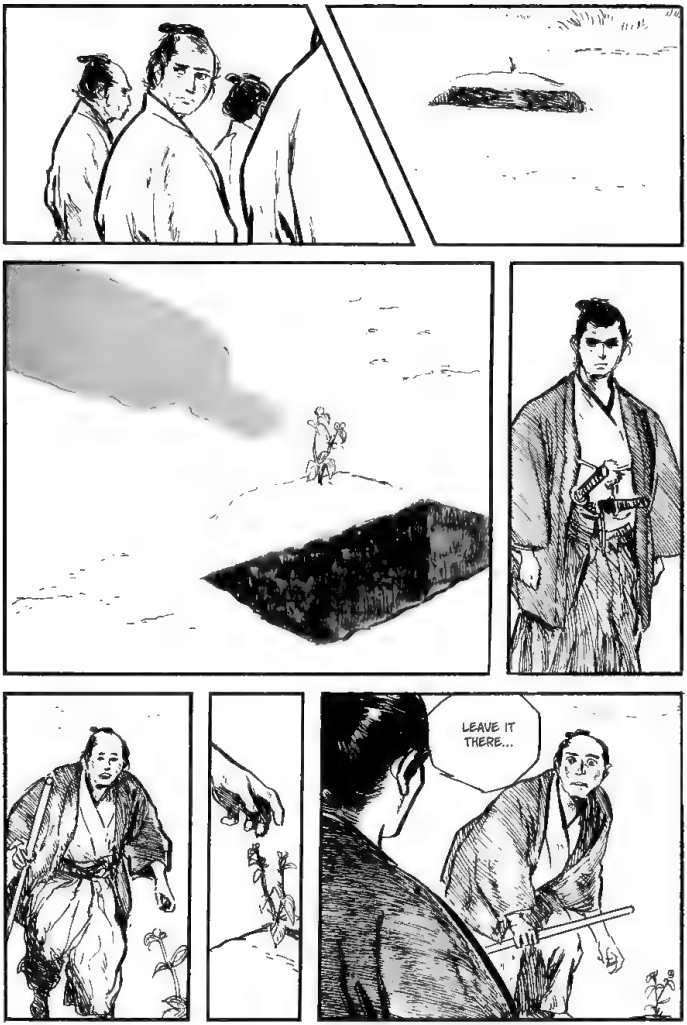


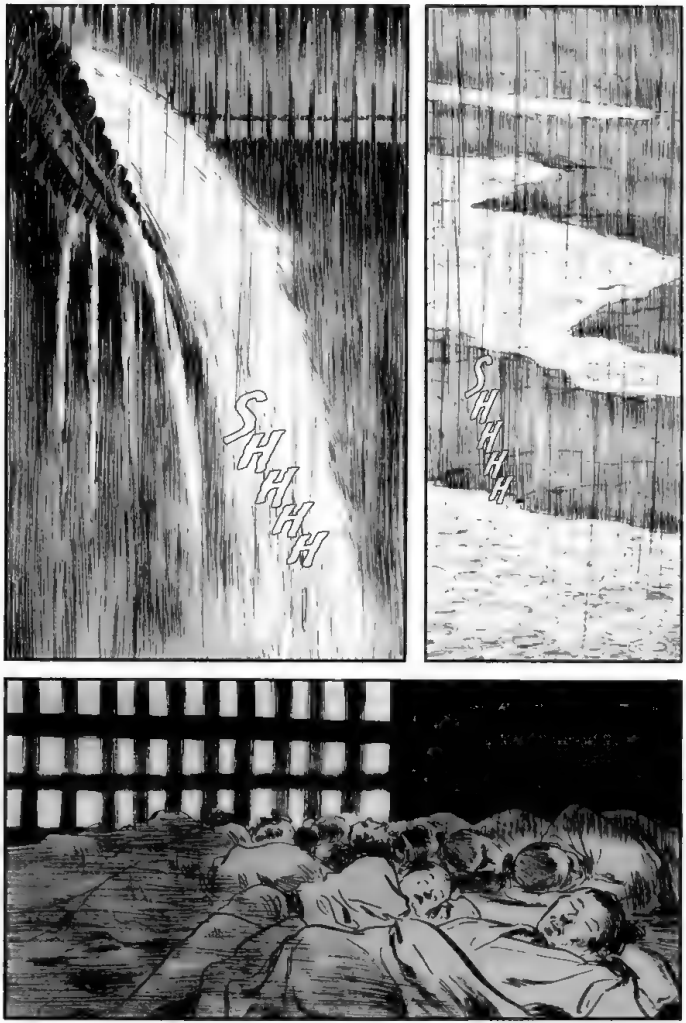


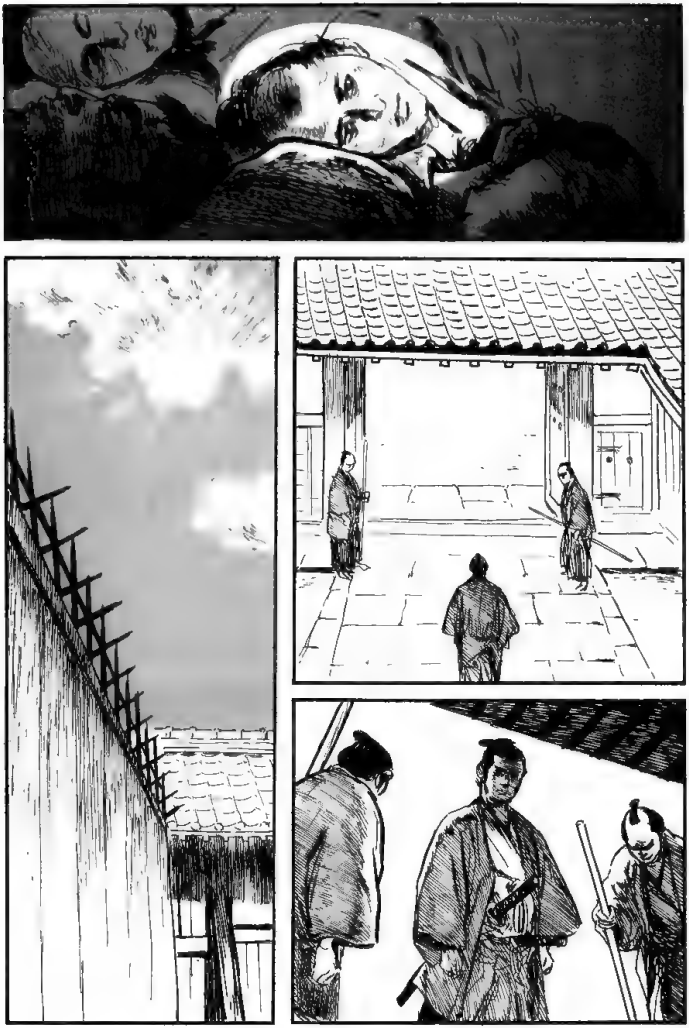


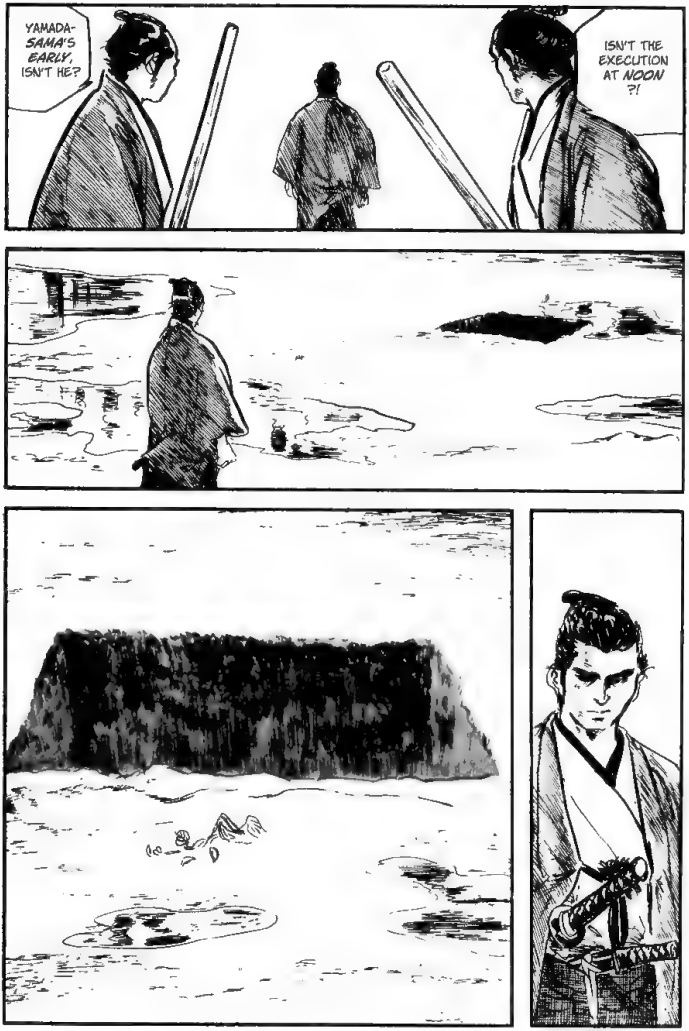




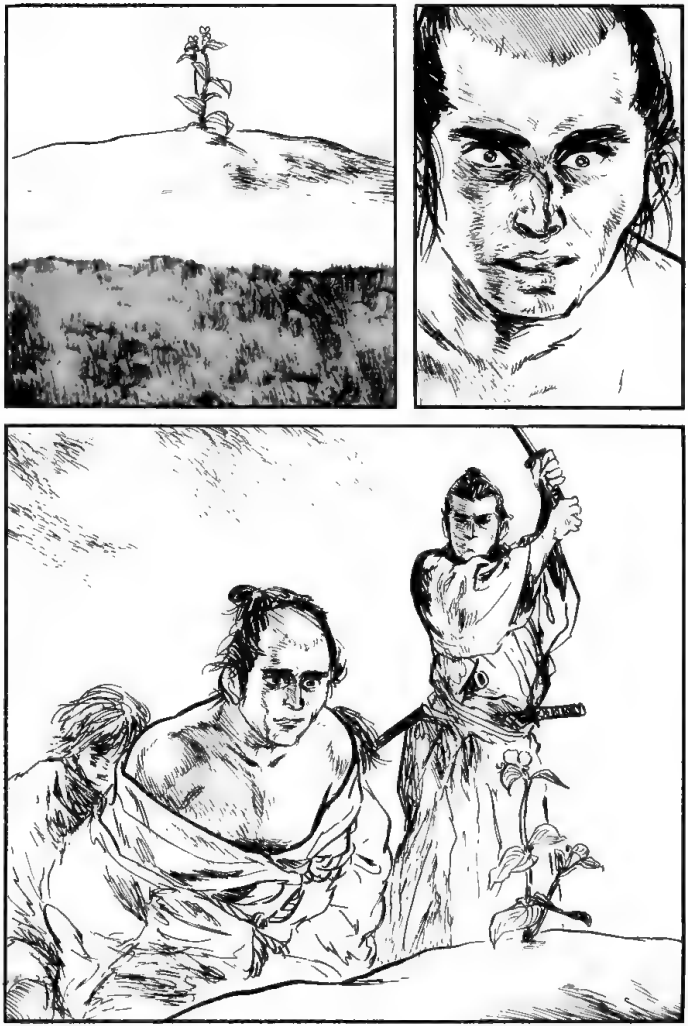

LEAVE IT THERE...


SHHHHH
SHHHH




YAMADA-SAMA'S EARLY, ISN'T HE?
ISN'T THE EXECUTION AT NOON ?!

SO YOU DON'T WANT IT?!



GLOSSARY

gobari
The five domains.

han
A feudal domain.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes o and go, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Samurai Executioner*:

chan – for children, young women, and close friends.
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures.
sama – used for superiors.
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals.
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

hour of the boar
Between 9 and 11 P.M.

jikisan
A samurai directly under the shogun.

jitte
A metal truncheon carried by policemen.

kappa
A water sprite.

matoi
A fireman's banner.

penpen grass
Shepherd's Purse. "Penpen" describes the sound made by a shamisen instrument. Penpen grass resembles the pick used to play the shamisen.

roju
Inner circle of councilors directly advising the shogun.

shamisen
A Japanse musical instrument resembling a lute.

Tamaya and Kagiya
The two leading fireworks manufacturers of the time in Japan.

Tenma
Tenma prison.

three lands
India, China, and Japan.

wakizashi
A short sword.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started *the Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma* 1/2 creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

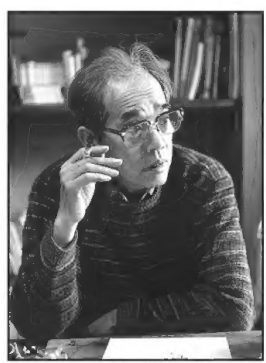
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami (Lone Wolf and Cub)*. Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of 71.



The stoic bushido world of *Samurai Executioner* is one full of flying, disembodied heads and odd happenings. And this volume is no exception. Ever present are stories of crimes and ensuing punishment, and plenty of squirting blood, but this volume promises a story that will fascinate and produce a few grins.

A mysterious woman, with a turtle-like demon tattooed on her back and the ability to swim like a fish, is stealing weapons of men around Edo. It's scarring egos and causing lots of problems. Of course, our protagonist Asa has the answer to the mystery. And in a surprise turn, a samurai cop whom we've met before finally captures the woman, and does so in a rather erotic way.

Samurai Executioner turns many angles and tells many stories, while sticking to a serial storyline, a samurai crime drama series like no other!

Published for the first time in America in the Japanese format.

Punished is not the man himself, but the evil that resides in him.

DARK HORSE MANGA™

首斬り朝

FOR READERS 18+
FOR MATURE READERS